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around the grounds

MLB, NFL turf pros renovate HS field

It wasn't the smell of freshly cut grass, the 70-degree weather or the gentle breeze that made January 18 such an outstanding day in Phoenix. It was the spirit of teamwork in the air.

That day more than 50 professional sports turf managers from the National Football League and Major League Baseball converged on the baseball field at North High School in central Phoenix and completely renovated the playing surface as a community service project. Using equipment and materials provided by Covermaster, Toro, and Turface Athletics, the skilled volunteers dragged and raked the infield, leveled the playing surface, rebuilt the batter's box and pitcher's mound, and mowed, edged, and striped the turf.

"This really gives us the opportunity to work together, and we don't usually get to do that," said Bob Christofferson, head groundskeeper for the Seattle Mariners and one of the organizers of the event. "Since we have NFL and MLB guys here, we'll definitely learn a lot from each other."

"This is probably the most exciting thing that's happened here in 15 years," said Zack Munoz, principal of North High School, who was previously athletic director. "We were so excited to be chosen, and to have them give us a major league-type of field is just phenomenal."

North is an inner-city school with approximately 2,500 students. The school has only one baseball field and due to the high traffic and low maintenance budget, conditions had become less than ideal. But after the volunteers were finished, it was transformed into a veritable field of dreams.

"The biggest thing was to give back to the community," said Christofferson. "We have a team of talented professional working together here to make this field better than it was before."

Later in the week, the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) used the field to conduct seminars and workshops on pitcher's mound maintenance and repairs, infield preparation, field logo painting and

stenciling, line painting and field layout, game day cosmetics, and other topics. The North High School staff attended so they can learn how to maintain these high-quality playing conditions.

"Toro is extremely proud to be a part of this great event," said Dale Getz, national sports fields and grounds sales manager for Toro. "Grounds managers take immense pride in their work and often have to face the reality of fields weary from over use. By pitching in to renovate this field, we will not only improve the field, but the community pride of the athletes and spectators that use the facility. The field managers and sponsors really teamed up in a big way to make this school's dream a reality." **ST**

Canyon Communications, Mesa, AZ, supplied this article, www.canyoncomm.com.



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