

Blue Valley SD overcomes winterkill to earn FOY

BY JODY GILL

The Switzer District Athletic Complex (SWIDAC) in Overland Park, KS has earned the 2004 Football Field of the Year honors in the High School/Parks category.

The Blue Valley School District built SWIDAC in 1993. The concrete and brick football stadium is a full-service venue with concessions and restrooms located on home and visitor mezzanines. Total football seating capacity is 5,500. The double-sided press box rises above and behind the concrete on grade bleachers with ample room for coaching staff, press, and stadi-

um management staff. The same press box also serves the sand-based Bermudagrass, soccer-specific pitch located just west of the football venue with an additional 2,500 seats. Competition baseball and softball fields are located on the east side of the visitor's bleachers.

The modern facility features multi-channel sideline communications system, concert quality sound system with wireless microphones for officials, two fully equipped locker rooms, officials' locker rooms and an 8-lane latex track with ample space for all field and jumping events. Four 95-foot concrete poles with a total of 92-1500 watt metal halide lamps illuminate the track and field for nighttime events.

The centerpiece of the facility is the competition football field. This is the home field for the Blue Valley Northwest Huskies and the Blue Valley North Mustangs. From 1993 through spring of 1997, I-25 rotors broken into 5-5 head zones irrigated the fescue field. The poorly designed irrigation system had been plagued by poor pressure due to limited water supply. In June 1997, improvements were made; the 5 head zones were broken into 2 and 3 head zones, resulting in much lower flow rates and increased dynamic pressure. Also rotors and valves were replaced as needed, and additional perimeter zones were installed to improve overall coverage.

After irrigation improvements were completed the turf was converted to Bermudagrass. In July 1997, our crews installed Quickstand Bermudagrass sod that we harvested from our 10-acre Bermuda turf farm. The renovated field was ready for play in late-August 1997. In June of 2003, we gave the field a drainage enhancement by removing the turf once more to allow us to laser grade the surface followed by re-sprigging. Again the field was ready for play in late August. The rootzone of the playing field is a clay-loam native soil. The field has no subsurface drainage so the 1.8% crown is key to keeping the field playable in wet weather by moving excess water rapidly to sideline storm water inlets.

From late February through May, the football facility is used only for track and field events. Practices occur every day and there are 6-7 track meets during the spring. During June and July, the facility is available for rent by the general public and has been used by many outside groups for events such as Relay for Life, semi-pro football games, track meets, Special Olympics, concerts, etc. August through November is reserved for high school football and band competitions. Since the facility is a home for two schools, sometimes there will be games on Thursday and Friday nights. Occasionally, we will host junior high school games on Wednesday afternoons. The high school bands practice on the field Wednesday and Thursday nights and the football team will practice on the field the day before their home game. We also host several marching band festivals, which are becoming very popular.

Staff and maintenance

Our Grounds Services staff is outstanding. John Peterman, Grounds Supervisor, is in charge of the Grounds Technician



Team, which includes Tom Brown, Irrigation; Mike Lieker, Landscape; Eric Farr, Certified Chemical Applicator; Jim Meyer, Mechanic; and Steve Moore, Traffic, Safety and Playground Technician. Jim Wilson, Assistant Grounds Supervisor, heads up the Sports Facility Team, which includes Dennis Martin, Brenda Wade, Dan Moore, and Victor Mutunga. The Mowing Team includes Joe Golden, Steve Caldwell, Bill Turner, Khalid Nawaz, Bill Dickinson, and Gary Rutledge.

Together this group is responsible for some 800 acres of property including all of the lawns, landscapes, playgrounds, roads and parking lots at 30 schools. Athletic areas include 8 varsity stadium fields, 26 high school practice fields, 8 middle school competition football fields, 9 other middle school practice fields, and 24 elementary athletic fields. Of those 75 fields on 119 acres, 52 fields on 80 acres have centrally controlled automatic irrigation, 36 fields on 60 acres are Bermuda turf, and 15 fields on 30 acres are sand based rootzones. Our crew performs all maintenance and most construction work, including irrigation design and installation, dual slope laser grading, and turf installation. Having this capability in-house allows flexibility in renovation timing and keeps construction and renovation costs minimal.

SWIDAC football field maintenance is fairly easy and relatively inexpensive. In February-March, a low rate of Roundup is applied to control grasses and poa. In April, we mow to 1/2" and apply a balanced soluble fertilizer. May calls for 3/4" mowing every 5 days plus a 1-lb. application of slow release N and K.

June-August is busier with 3/4" mowing every 3-4 days, monthly aeration and sand topdressing, 1-lb. N urea every 21 days, and a Revolver application for cool-season grass control in July, if needed. The grass gets taller in September with 1.5" mowing every 4 days, 10-20-20 fertilizer, and Roots Standup every 7 days. October means a 2" mowing as needed and another 10-20-20 application. If we have an early frost or November playoff games are likely, we will topdress lightly and paint the field green to make the white lines, numbers and logos look brighter on the rapidly browning turf.

Winterkill 2004

Although we have been growing and transplanting our own Bermudagrass since 1996, we had not suffered significant winterkill until January 2004. We knew we had a major problem when turf areas from the size of a truck to entire fields were not showing signs of greening by mid-May 2004. By early June, it was clear that we had lost more than 20 acres of turf on 31 fields, including about 60% of the SWIDAC field. Turf loss like this would be catastrophic for most organizations, but for our crew, it was just an inconvenience.

Fortunately, our turf farm was healthy and green. Field usage schedules were modified. The crew worked tirelessly, harvesting and hauling some 40,000 bushels of sprigs and planting 2-3 fields per day until we finished in late June. All turf was re-established and all fields were back in service by late August 2004.

The Switzer District Athletic Complex is not only a shining star for the Blue Valley School District but also a source of pride for the Grounds Services Department. I thank the STMA for recognizing the extraordinary efforts of my staff in providing the students and patrons of the Blue Valley School District with safe and aesthetically pleasing playing surfaces. **ST**

Jody Gill is the Grounds Coordinator for the Blue Valley School District in Overland Park, KS.



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