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around the grounds

# Little League WS experience inspires student

BY GEORGE G BERNARDON, CSFM

**N**ow I can say that one of life's goals is complete. It took a number of years but I did what every father dreams of, taking his son to the Little League World Series.

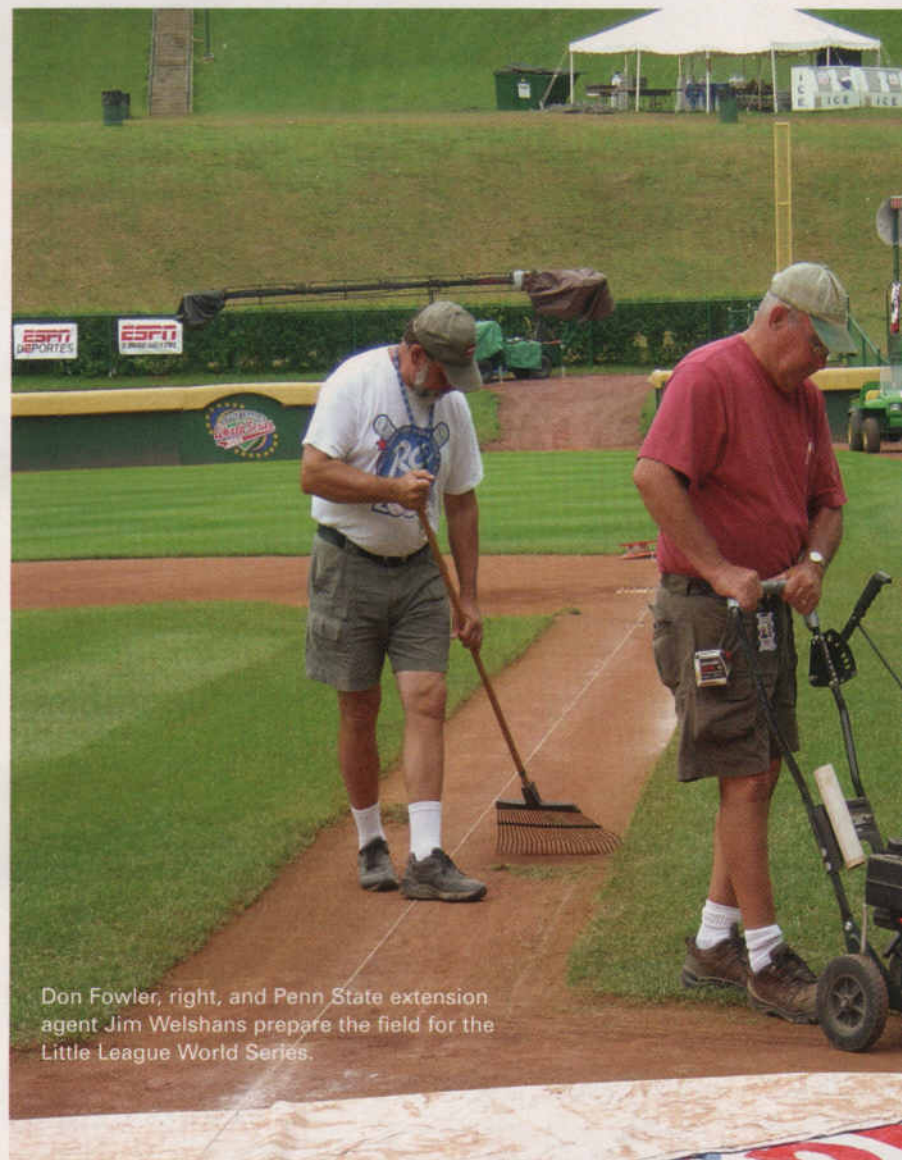
But Alex was 16, six feet one inches tall and obviously not a Little Leaguer. Instead, we had been invited to join Don Fowler's handpicked group of volunteers and local personnel that assemble once a year to create the masterpiece field that everyone sees on TV. What a unique group of individuals; there was a teacher, elementary school principal, three high school students including my son, three Ag extension agents, a local park manager, city worker, the owner of a local landscape contract business, one professional athletic field manager and one certified sports field manager.

When I arrived Friday morning (day before national and international championship games) everyone was on the field working together to get the job done. At the lead was Don Fowler, retired Penn State extension agent, ensuring that all tasks were being completed. His biggest job was really juggling the field management team around the television crew requests and completing all the required tasks through minor filming interruptions.

On game day Don met with the production crews early in the morning long before we field managers arrived. Rain was in the forecast and they wanted to get both games in. It was agreed that both fields would be made TV and game ready just in case. No problem! The field management team assembled, received directions from Don,

and off we went preparing both sites. By noon both fields were ready.

As time for the International championship game approached, so did the heavy clouds. Game time was scheduled for 2:00 PM; at 1:45 the Public Announcer asked everyone to seek cover due to a line of heavy thunderstorms in the area. Don working with production crew, decided that we would cover the field in advance of the storm. We were late, the rain started before we got the cover down, but before any damage



Don Fowler, right, and Penn State extension agent Jim Welshans prepare the field for the Little League World Series.





Fowler and his crew break for a "photo op."

could occur. Fifteen minutes later the worst of the storm had passed and we started pushing the water off the tarp with any thing that could move water. As we were rolling up the tarp the PA announcer said "Let's hear it for our grounds crew" and a loud roar came from the stands. We got a little respect!

Once the game was over everyone picked up hand tools, buckets, wheelbarrows, paint and went to work. Less than one hour later the field was ready for the American championship game. During this game my son and I stayed at field level serving as the emergency grounds crew. He really enjoyed himself as we sat in the dugout with one of the teams and the TV crew. As the camera panned into the dugout, Alex got in a few on-screen cameo shots, which they noticed back home.

It was a wonderful experience and I could never thank Mr. Fowler



enough for the opportunity to serve. One footnote to this story, my son Alex has enrolled in a 2-year Sports Turf Management Program. **ST**

*George G Bernardon, CSFM, is Director of Grounds Management for GCA Services Group, Inc.*

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