

Isotopes Park in Albuquerque wins Field of the Year

The Sports Turf Managers Association's 2004 College Baseball Field of the Year belongs to Isotopes Park in Albuquerque, NM, home of both the University of New Mexico Lobos and the Pacific Coast League's AAA Albuquerque Isotopes. Jarad Alley is head groundskeeper and is assisted full-time by Bryan Waller. ("Isotope" means any of two or more forms of an element having the same or very closely related chemical properties. We didn't know either.)

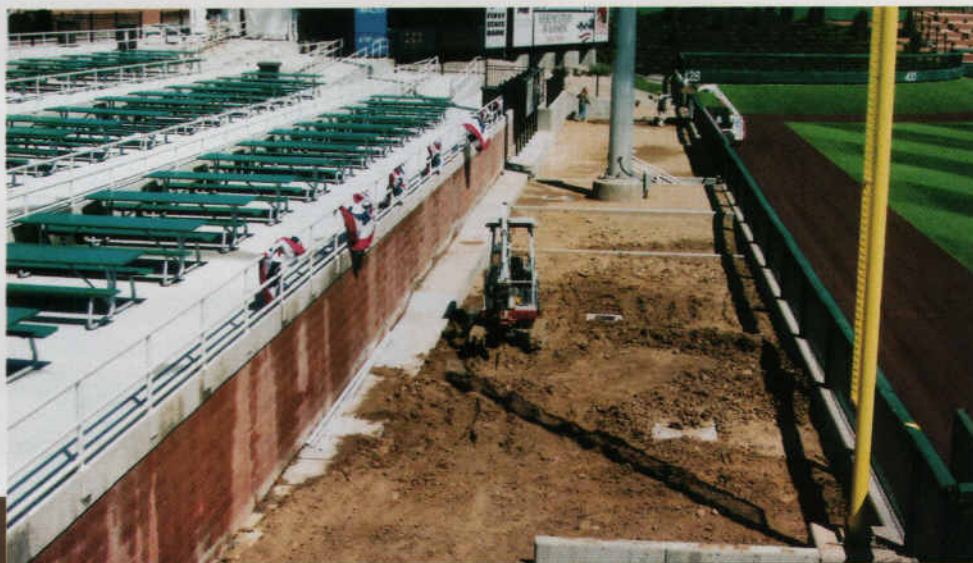
Isotopes Park is the renovation product of Dukes Stadium, completed in 2003 with a 14,000 capacity including a Creamland Berm grass seating area in right field. Mountain West Golfscapes of Peralta, NM, built the playing surface. The Kentucky bluegrass turf is at an elevation of 5,102 feet and the grass grows in a 92-8 sand/peat mix rootzone (blended by Dakota Peat).

Irrigation features include a Hunter system with ICC control clock with radio transmission, master valve, Hunter ICV valves, and I-20 and I-40 irrigation heads. Sixteen quick couplers provide for hand watering and hydro-jetting.

Though home to two teams, schedules work out so only a few days a year sees both teams using the field. Isotopes Park also hosts the New

Mexico Athletic Association state tournament (nine games over 3 days). Great cooperation between the university, pro franchise, and the state allow Alley and Waller a chance to keep the playing surface safe and presentable to everyone.

College baseball's early start means maintenance challenges. The bluegrass is



Maintenance Program

Winter: Maintain turf at 1 1/2 inches high, mow as needed

Spring: Maintain turf at 1 1/2 inches high, mow game days or 2-3 times a week

Summer: Maintain turf at 1 inch and OF at 1 1/4 inch, mow game days or 3 times a week

Fall: Maintain turf at 1 inch, mow game days or 3 times a week

(110 baseball games played in 2004)

January 2004

Administrative and shop work
6-2-0 Milorganite (.25 lbs. N/1000)

February

Start bullpen relocation
Put out turf covers
6-2-0 Milorganite (.25 lbs. N/1000)

March

21-0-0 ammonium sulfate (1 lbs. N/1000)
4-0-10 perk (.25 lbs. N/1000)
Bullpen relocation project

April

Built mounds for bullpen projects
Aerate and sweep cores
Topdress 30 tons of sand
20-10-20 (.75 lbs. N/1000)
4-1-10 perk (.25 lbs. N/1000)
Crumb rubber high traffic areas
Replace sod where needed

May

18-4-10 (.6 lbs. N/1000)
4-0-10 perk (.25 lbs. N/1000)
20-0-25 (.4 lbs. N/1000)
Replace sod where needed

June

Hosted NM East-West All-Star Game
18-4-10 (.5 lbs. N/1000)
Gypsum and K-Mag @ 5 lbs. each per 1000)

July

Hydroject full field in two directions
Aerate and sweep cores
Topdress 30 tons of sand
20-0-25 (.5 lbs. N/1000)
18-4-10 (.5 lbs. N/1000)

August

Fungicide X for tarp areas
20-4-10 (.75 lbs. N/1000)
0-0-28 micronutrient pak (5 lbs. per 1000)

September

Overseed infield and aprons
Aerate and sweep cores
Topdress 60 tons of sand
21-3-18 (.5 lbs. N/1000)
Gypsum and K-Mag@ 5 lbs. each per 1000

October

18-4-10 (.25 lbs. N/1000)
21-3-18 (.25 lbs. N/1000)
Changed infield cut-outs
Added sod to old bullpen areas
Added infield skin sprinkler zone
Re-level by laser the skin, baselines and plate

November/December

Equipment maintenance
Shop and too maintenance
Office work for year-end
UMAXX slow release (2 lbs. N/1000)

mostly dormant in February and early March, which can cause playability problems. Daily mound and skin work also is adjusted in these conditions. Alley uses turf blankets (Covermaster) on the infield and aprons over the winter and early season to help against the abuse. "We make sure to keep divots filled with sand and seed mix during these early months to promote new growth throughout the season," he says.

He also tries to overseed and hand aerate the high traffic areas consistently during the season to combat the wear and compaction. Just keeping his crew fresh is tough when you have two teams playing on one field. "We use our game day staff as much as possible to keep the field in great shape immediately following events to minimize the maintenance needed when both teams are on the road," says Alley.

Relocating bullpens

Last year the Isotopes relocated the bullpens from on the field to an area between the left field wall and a picnic pavilion, which made play much safer and cleaned up fans' sight lines. Alley was able to add a row of I-20 sprinklers to the bottom of the berm in centerfield because one row at the top wasn't providing sufficient water to the entire hill.

This year they completed the bullpen project by adding turf to the old bullpen areas along the warning track and changing the shape of the cut-outs around the bases. The latter move will help the crew keep the cut-outs in much better shape, Alley says. A zone of I-25 high-speed rotors to



water the skin was added, which will save time and water during the season.

Normal day

Game time is 7:11 PM. 10 AM to 12 PM: Mow field and water skin
 1-3:30 PM: Set up batting practice, water skin, prep bullpen mounds
 3:30: Pitcher's stretch
 4:15 Batting practice for both teams
 6:00 Take down batting practice and pre-game field prep
 Field prep is:

1. Rake entire skin, baselines, plate and mound
2. String baselines and batters boxes for chalking
3. Water plate, baselines, and skin
4. Chalk baselines and batters boxes
5. Paint plate and rubber on mound
6. Pull the lines that were strung for baselines and roll up hose
7. Walk around and doublecheck that everything is in the right place
8. Make sure all the water is turned off

In-game activities include raking player position spots using four rakes after the 3rd and 7th innings, and an infield drag after the 5th inning (five drags and two rakes). **ST**

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Slugger Field, Nielsen win 2nd Field of Year title

It is not easy to grow bluegrass in the transition zone but Tom Nielsen, turf manager at Louisville's Slugger Field, seems to have it down. The Sports Turf Managers Association awarded its 2004 Professional Baseball Field of the Year Award to Nielsen, his second award in the past 3 years.

"I've been told ours is one of the few 100% bluegrass fields this far south," Nielsen says. "Since disease pressure is my most difficult challenge, so water management is the most important aspect of my managing the field."

Slugger Field's irrigation system consists of 34 Hunter I-20s, 46 I-40s, and nine I-44 heads totaling 89 heads in 13 zones, including the infield clay area. It can be controlled by a control panel or by remote control. Nielsen manually adjusts irrigation run times based on the daily use of a hand-held soil moisture sensor. In



between cycles, he waters by hand. There are eight quick couplers positioned around the field so that the entire field can be watered with a 130-foot hose.

In 2004, between March 30 and October 7, Slugger Field hosted more than 115 events, including 72 Bats games, a wedding, a Kentucky Derby Festival event, and kids camp-out nights.

Nielsen says he used to have a problem caused by having to pull the tarp 40-50 times a year. "The majority of the time, the tarp is left on the field for long periods, which of course leads to a greater potential for disease. To solve this, we placed two 22-inch Air Max fans under two sides of the tarp. The fans can move air 150 feet, and this air creates a bubble underneath the tarp so that the water rolls off easily and enables a crew of four to pull the tarp off. Also, the air movement under the tarp lessens the chance of disease in our hot, humid climate," he says. "Without the air bubble underneath the tarp, it would normally take 12-14 people to dump the tarp." **ST**

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Maintenance Program

Fertilization (granular)

Magnesium-twice in the spring, twice in the fall. Sulfate of potash-twice in the spring, twice in the fall. 12-3-8 organic fertilizer-once in the spring, once in the fall.

Gro Power fertilizer 0-0-15 (every 2 weeks, June-Sept.), Gro Power fertilizer 10-2-5 (two applications, one spring, one fall), Gro Power fertilizer 5-3-1 (three applications: March, late April, and fall, all after aerification), Gro Power fertilizer 45% magnesium (twice in spring, twice in fall).

Fertilizer (liquid) superior and Floratine Turf Products program

Bi-weekly program: Floradox (oxygen stabilizer with proteins, carbohydrates, and biochemicals to strengthen response), Assure (5-16-4 +5% Ca Phosphorus), Iron Man (12-0-4 Foliar iron), K-29 (0-0-29 Potassium concentrate), Provide (micronutrients), Essence (essential secondary and micronutrients), Relief (8-0-0 +8% Ca Foliar calcium), Tiger Turf (4-4-16), Now (18-0-3).

Once a month during growing season: Calphlex (chelated calcium), Phlex-Man (liquid manganese). Spring and fall: Per-4-Max (auxiliary nutrient N-P-K), p-48 (10-45-8)

As needed: Titan (14-1-0)

Weed Control

MSMA post-emergent for grassy weeds 18-4-10 with Dimension pre-emergent herbicide (soil temp 55 degrees); Momentum post-emergent weed control for broadleaf weeds

Fungicide

Preventative applications: March-October. Curative applications when disease is present. Fungicides used: Mancozeb, Chipco 26 GT, Touche, Banner Maxx, Manicure, PCNB, Heritage, Prodigy, Eagle, and T-Storm

Insecticide

Mach II. Apply June 1. White grub and sod webworm, apply August 30

Wetting agent

Retain-Max pellets for watering and syringing hot spots

Mowing

Height of cut 1 1/4-inch all season. Mow every day when team is home. Every other day when team is on the road.

Aerification

Hollow tines-once in the spring, once in the fall, if possible. Drag in cores and topdress 1/16-inch

Solid tines-each month during the playing season. Do not topdress.

Infield, Mound and Plate Maintenance

Till infield 6 inches deep in spring and mid-way through the season. Float to level the infield, roll with a 1-ton roller. Compact infield with a 1-ton roller every other day when games are being played. Cover with 1/4-inch of MuleMix soil conditioner. Water clay deeply to keep moist. Screen infield with John Deere bunker rake for pre-game and post-game grooming. For 5th inning drag, use four 2 x 8-inch stiff drag mats. Nail drag the infield during the season as needed. Mounds and plates are patched with Klawog clay.

Lip Maintenance

Rake and sweep out edges after each game. Blow out edges with hose after each home stand. Edge field every third day.

Winter

December: Cover infield and aprons with turf blankets, blow out irrigation, put down PCMB fungicide, maintain all equipment.

Miscellaneous

Take soil test three times a year. Tissue test twice a year. Overseed in fall-400 pounds of Midnight Bluegrass seed. Per-germinate seed during the season. My bluegrass varieties are Ram, Georgetown, 1757, and Midnight.

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