

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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