

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.

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**

The STMA Field of the Year Awards Program has been made possible through the generous support of its sponsors. They include Bayer; Carolina Green; Covermaster; Hunter Industries; Jacobsen, A Textron Co.; Nu-Gro; Turface Athletics/Profile Products; Turf Seed; West Coast Turf; and World Class Athletic Surfaces.

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.