

from the sidelines

You think you have it rough?

Jimmy Rodgers, CSFM, wanted a new challenge and he got one. After five successful years at the University of Virginia, last spring Jimmy took over as head turf manager at RFK Stadium, new home to the Washington Nationals as well as pro soccer's DC United. We checked in with Jimmy in mid-July:

"On Opening Day we simply did not have enough hard packing pitcher's mound clay incorporated into our pressure points. I corrected it the next day, but some players had heard about the opener and saw problems where there were none," Jimmy said. "I took some grief for about a week when things settled down.

"In the interim, the front office instructed me to use a different mound clay product. So I excavated all of the clay that I had placed on and after April 15, and replaced it with this new product, which failed miserably. The third game on it, with 300-game winner Greg Maddux pitching, the umpires asked for our assistance to fix the mound," Jimmy said. "After that fiasco, I re-excavated the inferior clay and placed my preferred brand, which we'd used originally. We have had no mound issues since."

The RFK mound disappears into the infield for soccer set-ups. "We have had a few glitches, but for the most part the hydraulically driven plate operates as intended," Jimmy said. The cylinder that the mound is lowered into is too small so we have to cut out an 18-inch perimeter all the way around the mound for each conversion. After we cut it, the mound recesses 4 feet under the playing surface."

"For the most part, the field is performing well," Jimmy said. "The Bermudagrass sod, overseeded with rye, that was installed in March either came with very little Bermuda base or froze out once installed, because I have very little Bermuda to speak of. Last week [July 10-17], we ripped out our infield and foul ground areas and replaced with 100% Bermudagrass.

"The outfield is 80% ryegrass which is problematic in that there are now two different fields to manage. Different fertility, different mowing heights, different fungicidal needs, certainly different aesthetics," Jimmy said.

I asked Jimmy what are the biggest issues in changing the field from baseball to soccer or vice versa. "The wear that the field receives from the conversions. Soccer has required that all infield clay areas, mound and home plate, be grassed for their games. Converting back to baseball is difficult work," Jimmy said. "During baseball road trips I can't fine tune because it's a soccer field. I didn't realize how stressful both physically and mentally it would be. What we're trying to do is too big a bite."



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