



## Brooks, Hillcrest are STMA's best in Schools/Parks baseball

Hillcrest Booster Field, Simpsonville, SC won the Sports Turf Managers Association's 2005 Field of the Year in the School/Parks category for baseball. Hillcrest FFA advisor and sports turf manager is David C. Brooks, who has a Masters in Ag Ed with many turf manage-

ment courses at Clemson University under his belt. Here Brooks answers some questions from *SportsTurf*:

**ST:** What tips do you have for school turf managers for getting the most out of limited budgets?

**Brooks:** The first one is take time to evaluate your NEEDS, and not just your WANTS. Take the time to do an in-depth needs assessment and stick to it.

I prioritized two main things my first year: getting our fertility program back up to par, and relieving soil compaction. My pH was about 4.4, and my P and K were drastically low. I spent the large part of my budget the first year correcting these issues, and doing weekly aerification.

There was nothing glamorous about spreading lime and fertilizer, and aerifying every week, but this would turn out to be the foundation for our success in the end. My students had much rather be sitting atop some fancy mower, or riding a nice shiny tractor that first year, but we had to stick to our needs not our wants.

Another tip is to spend some time getting to know the people in your community. The saying that "friends are better than money" is very true in my case. It is not enough to just know what your needs are, sometimes there is no way that you are going to meet them on a very limited budget without some help, and that is just what I got.

Our local rec departments loaned us spreaders and slicers, and Greenville Turf and Tractor put our kids and safety ahead of profit by loaning us a tractor and core aerifier that made all the difference. And the great folks at Fox Run Country Club loaned us a topdresser to spread some much-needed sand. Much of this support was forged by walking into businesses (hat in hand) and just asking for whatever support they could give, and spending time educating the community by talking to the local Rotary clubs about what we were trying to accomplish in our school.

The last tip is to constantly get outside of your comfort zone. So what if you have never tried to make endzone stencils for a football field? So what if you have never designed a new pattern on your baseball field, or so what if you have never rebuilt an infield skin—just do it! Even if it is not major league quality, with a little time and effort you can still do some wonderful things for very little money that the kids and the fans will never forget.

**ST:** Tell us about your background, how you got interested in turf management, and what your specific responsibilities are now. How has membership in the STMA helped your career?

**Brooks:** I have been involved with growing grass most of my life, however not always as an athletic playing surface. Until about 5 years ago I grew grass for our family's beef cattle.

I received a BS degree in Animal Science from Clemson and then after deciding to teach I received a Masters in Ag Education with an emphasis in Turfgrass. After arriving at Hillcrest in Simpsonville SC, I went to a high school football game one night and saw the sorry state that our fields were in. And it just hit me, here are some great turfgrass labs! The marriage of agriculture and athletics was born soon after a visit to the AD and coach.

Our first year we only were responsible for the football game field. I think that the first year was basically a test for us to see if we knew what we were doing. The next year our responsibilities grew to include two practice fields, baseball, softball, soccer and lacrosse. We were now



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# FIELD OF THE YEAR

providing a turnkey service for all of our coaches. Our Sportsturf classes are responsible for the year-round maintenance of the fields including painting, and game day prep work.

After that long first year I knew that there was no way that I could do this job if I was going to have to re-invent the wheel with every task that I undertook, so a friend told me about the South Carolina STMA, and the STMA. This has been by far the best organization that I have ever been involved with as far as providing practical, professional advice as well as incredible networking potential. The STMA has afforded me the opportunity to meet and gain knowledge and friendship with two of the most respected turfgrass managers in my area: Mike Echols, head of athletic grounds for Clemson, and Clark Cox who is in the same position with the University of South Carolina. The impact that they have had on my students' lives is immeasurable, and I would not even be close to the position that I am in today without the help of these two. The STMA has also afforded me the opportunity to meet local vendors and sales reps for everything from my equipment needs to chemical and fertilized needs.

**ST:** What's your biggest challenge been this season?

**Brooks:** Our biggest challenge has been trying to manage the

transition times. Fall ball for baseball is generally going strong right at the time that we need everybody off for a successful overseeding process. Then when we are headed into playoffs and starting summer tournaments on our field, it is when we spray out our rye and our Bermuda is at its weakest. It is hard to get people to understand that these two times of the year are critical for the overall quality of the field, and the field can not be beautiful 365 days out of the year. Sometimes I just have to sit the coaches down and let them know that the field needs a rest if it is going to live up to their expectations the rest of the season.

**ST:** What is the best part of the job?

**Brooks:** The best part of my job is teaching young people about what I feel is without a doubt the most exciting, innovative, and rewarding subject in the school system. The implications of Sportsturf management incorporates math, plant science, agronomy, chemistry and agriculture into one exciting package for students. Our class projects have real-world impact around our school on a daily basis. Our work is not only graded by the teacher, but also by the student athletes as well as the community as a whole that uses our facilities. ■



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