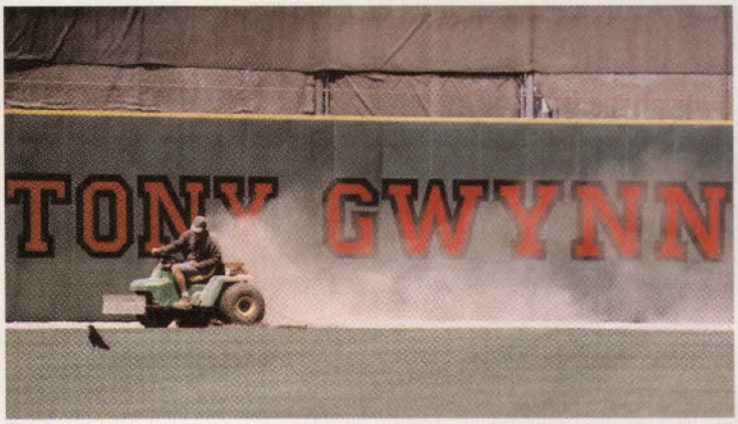

Tony Gwynn Stadium field also a star

San Diego State's Charlie Smith Field at Tony Gwynn Stadium, and its turf manager Ron Hostick, CSFM, won the 2005 STMA Field of the Year in the College Baseball category. Named in honor of former Aztec and San Diego Padre All-Star outfielder Gwynn, the facility is ranked 5th nationally by *Baseball America* magazine's collegiate rankings.

The sand-based field was originally built in 1998 and in 2004 the infield and sideline areas were completely renovated, including removal of artificial sideline surface in favor of hybrid bermudagrass and warning track. The infield skin also was replaced and now features a clay/sand blend with an added stabilizer; a new grade also was created for the infield turf and skin. Hostick and his crew, including full-time staffer Michael Radigan and part-timer Dennis Mitchell, handled most of the project themselves.

The decision to renovate coincided with completion of San Diego's Petco Park, and to assist in the financing, John Moores, owner of the Padres, allowed a 3-day tournament to be held at Petco. The tournament proceeds, combined with the commitment of in-house labor from the Physical Plant office, and made possible the renovation.

To add durability to the new sideline surface, Hostick chose topsoil rather than the sand the field is built on, and he added compost from a local landfill to increase organic matter. Other product decisions were made after Hostick consulted with local sports turf managers. Through that network, he found a company that supplied a warning track material, quality topsoil, a laser-grader who specializes in sports fields (through a local STMA seminar), and an infield dirt mix that holds "enough moisture for texture for texture yet repels excess moisture."

FIELD OF THE YEAR

28 days

The stadium's event schedule allowed 1 month starting in early June and so Hostick and crew began by ripping up the sidelines with a front-end loader, while simultaneously taking out the infield layer to till in compost with the soil. New irrigation was installed and then new topsoil delivered to refill the sidelines. The infield turf and dirt were roughly laser-graded before the first delivery of new infield mix. After incorporating one load of mix to create a transition zone, the remaining mix was delivered.

For drainage, a finish grading from the grandstands to the start of the outfield was established, with a 1-% crown running from home plate, through the mound area, and leveling out behind second base. The layout of the turf was done in chalk and sod lay-to lines followed by a final grading to create the seamless transition from turf to dirt.

Construction lasted 28 days. After 1 week of grow-in time, we hosted a baseball camp. Sandwiched between summer events, we topdressed the sod with sand and ran extra irrigation. In November, another load of infield mix was placed and graded to correct any uneven settling, and we renovated (topdressed, graded, and overseeded) in preparation for the 2005 season.

Special challenges

Soil samples detected high salt and phosphorus levels and this condition was addressed by improving drainage and using gypsum with soil surfactants and liquid polymers to move the salt out of the rootzone. Fertilizers with high salt index or elevated phosphorus are avoided. Hostick says to maintain the high quality turf, foliar applications of nutrients augmented with a slow release nitrogen and high potassium granular are made to provide an even feeding.

Hosting more than 300 hours of tournaments and baseball camps, besides the 600 hours of primary baseball play, means Hostick has to be moving. "We get in early and stay ahead of the schedule. I recommend to do as much preparation before game day as possible," he says.

Irrigation is from the city water supply, regulated by a centralized control system feeding 2-inch remote control valves with 5-6 heads each on a square layout, waters the field. "Water is the key to a safe infield for us. We soak it down at every opportunity but the field has to drain well to get away with lots of water," says Hostick.

He reports that in 2006 he will be using two postemergence herbicides now available in California, a Poa annua one for overseeded and one for non-overseeded bermuda fields. He also now has new vertical mowing units for his 5-plex mower and a new turf vacuum sweeper.

What's the greatest pleasure Hostick derives from his job? "When everything comes together on a game day and the field looks good," he says.

What's his biggest headache? "My biggest headache is traffic. Why can they stand in more than one spot?! But [I know] the field is there to use, not just for looks." ■

Monthly Maintenance

Ron Hostick, CSFM, says, "Our maintenance plan is very fluid, every year is different. We have to make it fit the game schedule and the weather."

He takes best advantage of the brief window in November, immediately following fall practice, to dethatch and overseed before practice resumes at the end of December.

When the Aztecs' season ends, Hostick hosts the county high school finals and then sees camps, fundraisers and other events the rest of the year.

November: Renovate the field in prep for overseeding

December: Replace clay brick at mound and home plate; apply slow-release granular fertilizer

January: Begin bimonthly foliar nutrient applications; repair mound and home plate after every game

February: Begin growth regulator and seed head reducer applications (helps color and reduces poa annua)

March: Aerify with solid tines

April: Focus on edges of field and grooming in preparation for post-season play

May: Aerify with 1/2-inch hollow tines

June: Stop foliar application of nutrients

July-September: Aerify with 1/2-inch tines and vertical mow in two directions