

Berry, Olivet Nazarene win Field of the Year



Editor's note: Larry Berry, CSFM, who won the 2005 College/University Soccer Field of the Year Award while working as the assistant physical plant director at Olivet Nazarene University (ONU), has since taken a new position as director of physical plant at Lee University in Cleveland, TN. Berry answers a few questions here, followed by some information on ONU.

ST: What's the greatest pleasure you derive from your job?

Berry: It is difficult to pin down one greatest pleasure from my job. My responsibilities involve much more than just sports field management. If I had to pin down one thing in that area I would say that when someone hunts you down to tell you that the field performed well there is no greater compliment or satisfaction. We generally hear about things that are wrong in our industry from

everyone affected. Usually hearing nothing at all means that things are good. When someone takes the time to find you and let you know the field's performance was excellent you know it meant a lot to them.

ST: How did you prepare for, and then "repair" after, the Chicago Bear training camps at Olivet Nazarene?

Berry: Preparing for training camp involved many factors. We had a tremendous staff of people at Olivet that worked to construct four fields when we learned the Bears were coming to our facility. We did the majority of work in-house when building the fields so we had the fortunate experience of hands-on field construction several times over.

Our biggest challenge during the first years was to develop a system of maintenance that provided a great product not only for the Bears, but also for the student athletes at



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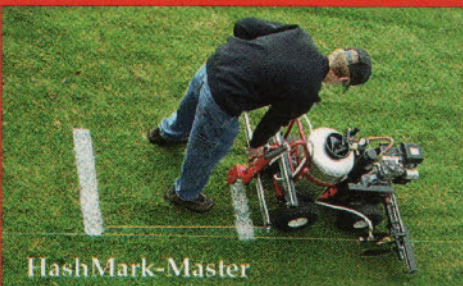


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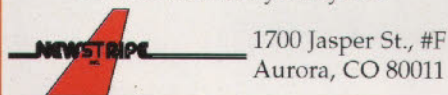
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FIELD OF THE YEAR



Olivet. Obviously, during training camp the practices cause a significant amount of damage to the turf. Olivet's teams start in the spring before the growing season begins and end late fall after the growing season ends. That only gives us a small window of opportunity to renovate with no traffic or activity in the summer before the Bears arrive.

We found the best approach for us was to be extremely aggressive with aerating, seeding, and topdressing throughout the spring, summer, and fall. We continually tweaked the program over the years to produce a system that has allowed us to keep from resodding to this point and use 100% bluegrass for overseeding and renovation. We have stayed flexible with our program as weather and other factors always need to be taken into account, but the basic maintenance plan worked wonderfully in that situation.

ST: What tips do you have for turf managers who must operate with limited budgets? How do you prioritize spending?

Berry: So many in our industry operate and accomplish so much with limited funds.

Budgets are scrutinized by administrations and it is important to put the funds where they work the best based on their decisions. Sometimes it's hard for us as sport turf managers to accept [these decisions] positively, but I try my best to go with the flow and work with what I have and focus on how to improve with the resources that have been made available.

Becoming negative about the obtainable funds and displaying a bad attitude about it does nothing to help the fields or improve your situation. I have found that some of the most basic things, things that do not cost significant amounts of money, can provide a solid foundation for improvement. For example, keeping clean and sharp mower blades takes more time but it also limits stresses to the grass, so that's a great low cost way to improve your turf.

We also learned that getting in touch with other local groups that do similar work allows you to share equipment. Sharing equipment allowed us to do work that normally we could not do, mostly cultural things for turf and dirt work with the skinned areas on the ball fields.



Trying to prioritize spending can be difficult. So many things come into play with weather factors, field use, and environment. I look at making sure equipment is maintained well and then try to see what is left for other things. I develop a basic program with whatever money is available and build from there if other funds become available.

ST: What do you think becoming a Certified Sports Field Manager has meant to your career?

Berry: It is probably a little early to tell how it may have helped me in my career. I have been fortunate enough to accomplish a lot in a short period of time, especially in regards to field construction and turf maintenance programs. When I decided to take the CSFM exam, part of me just wanted to see if I really had developed the type of knowledge that I knew many of my colleagues had in the STMA. I have been very fortunate to have access to some very knowledgeable people who have helped me out tremendously, like Ken Mrock with the Chicago Bears, and administrative leaders at Olivet like Matt Whitis. Matt gave me the freedom to develop my knowledge base over the past several years by taking courses and working with organizations such as STMA.

Olivet Nazarene is a private NAIA college in Bourbonnais, IL, 60 miles south of Chicago. The campus includes approximately 250 acres, with a 30-acre athletic complex that includes 14 acres of sports fields. Larry Berry reported in his FOY application that his field care budgets were increased only slightly in the past 10 years. The school relied on sound cultural practices and creative budgeting to keep their fields in shape. ■

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