

Dean Stadium

crew wins Pro Baseball Field of the Year

Marshall Jennings, director of field operations for Roger Dean Stadium in Jupiter, FL, and his crew won the Sports Turf Managers Association's 2005 Professional Baseball Field of the Year. The stadium is the heart of a 130 field complex that is spring home to both the World Champion St. Louis Cardinals and the Florida Marlins.

During the summer, Roger Dean plays host to two pro teams, the Palm Beach Cardinals and Jupiter Hammerheads of the Florida State League, making it the only stadium in the country serving as home team to two professional squads. Both teams play 70-game home schedules, part of more than 200 events that are held on the stadium field annually.

We exchanged emails with Marshall, who gives much credit to his full-time crew, Johnny Simmons and Karsten Blackwelder for their dedication:

ST: Did you make any adjustments, large or small, to your maintenance plan in 2006? Did you purchase any new equipment or products?

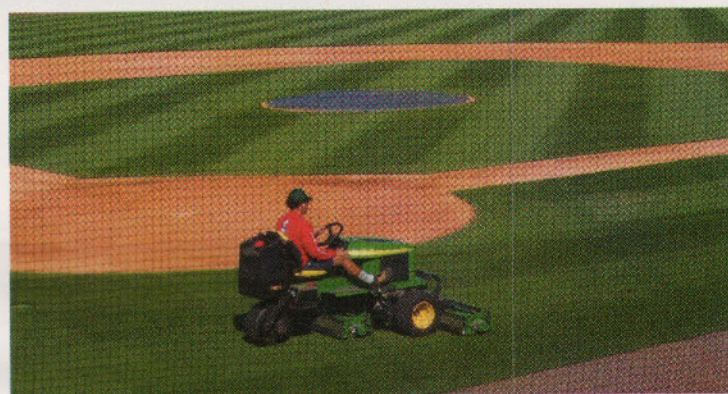
Jennings: We didn't make any adjustments to our maintenance plan in 2006. This was only the fourth year that we've had two minor league teams playing a 140-game schedule on the stadium field (in addition to the 32 consecutive Spring Training games). Over the first 3 years, we made the adjustments with fertility and cultural practices and we've seen improvements each year. Knowing that resodding around the homeplate area each year is inevitable, our goal is to reduce the square footage of sod that we replace each year.

ST: What are your keys to keeping the infield skin safe and playable through all the games and activities you have on your field? Any advice for someone who will be working a tournament for the first time?

Jennings: I don't know if our infield skin maintenance is much different from anyone with a "normal" schedule. We still have to water, scarify, nail drag, roll and add calcined clay as needed. Our biggest challenge is pulling the tarp with all of pop-up showers that we get being so close to the ocean. Obviously with two teams, we have to be ready to pull the tarp every single day since there are no 6 or 8-day road game series.

The second part of this question really doesn't apply to our stadium field.

We have only one tournament a year that involves the stadium field (although the rest of the complex sees tournament action a few times throughout the year). We have only the time that the tournament coor-



dinators allow us to work the fields between games. I'm sure this is the case at most places.

They are trying to play as many games as possible in a short amount of time. They may only allow time to re-chalk the lines and drag the infield, but never time to water the skin between games. The ultimate goal for the tournament coordinators is to finish as many games as possible in order to satisfy all of the players that come from all over the country to play a "guaranteed" number of games. The best advice I could give to someone working a tournament would be to work closely with the directors of the tournament and try to help them run as good of a tournament as possible. Let them know the limits of how much work can be done within a certain time frame if there is inclement weather and just keep an open line of communication with them. While

FIELD OF THE YEAR

most of us don't particularly care for the tournaments, the reality is that they provide a source of revenue for the complex and the community.

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

Jennings: I would have to say the biggest pleasure derived from this job is the compliments received about the facility. Whether it's the Major League players, high school players, fans who have visited from all over the country, or our own front office staff, the greatest satisfaction comes from knowing that the work of our crew is appreciated.

The biggest headache by far has to be pulling the tarp. In 2005, it was pulled 70 times and 69 times in 2004. There are days in the summer that the weather will be in such a pattern that it will rain at the same time or very near it each day. It's the pop up showers that dump 1 or 2 inches of rain in a short amount of time that we have to watch for. The skies will clear just as quickly as the rain appears. No sooner than the last raindrop hits the ground, the sun will be bearing down in no time. That means the tarp must come off as quickly as possible to avoid burning the turf. Repeat these steps a couple of times each day when we are in that weather pattern and it's enough to drive any sports turf manager insane. ■



Before a spring game, Jennings and crew were honored for winning the Field of the Year. From l to r: former Florida Marlins manager Joe Girardi, crew member Karsten Blackwelder, crew member Johnny Simmons, Marshall Jennings, and St. Louis Cardinals manager Tony LaRussa.



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