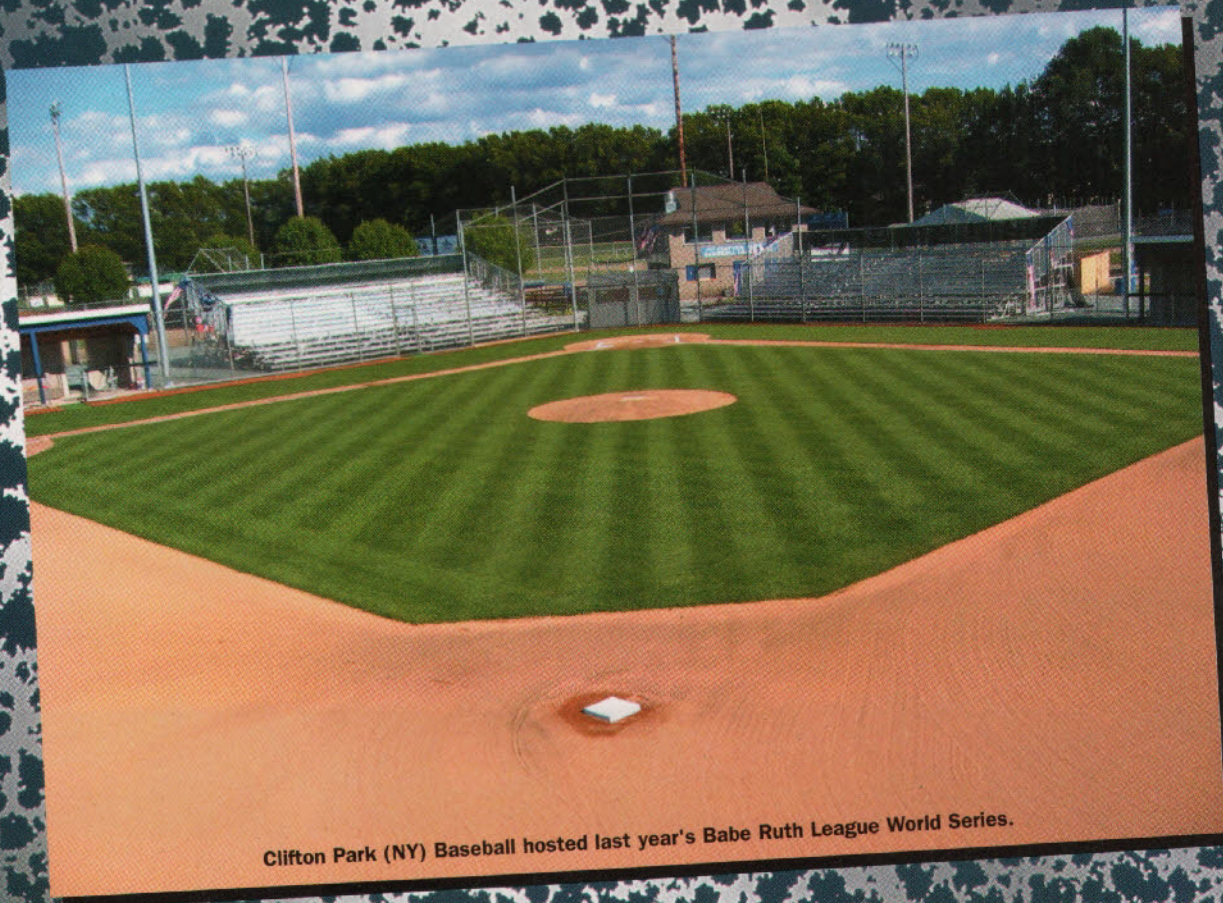


Distributor's diary: renovation in New York

By John A. Halloran



Clifton Park (NY) Baseball hosted last year's Babe Ruth League World Series.



The author (not pictured) helped prepare the field with experience and Toro equipment that he distributes.

Febbruary 6, 2006: Jerry Francis, Eastern New York Commissioner of Babe Ruth Baseball, calls to say that Clifton Park Baseball had been awarded the 13-15 Year Old Babe Ruth World Series to be held August 18-25. Jerry tells me that plans exist to replace sod on their entire infield after their regular season ends in mid-July. I thought this was a bad idea since it would be risky with high temperatures and killer July dew points. Jerry said he would pass the advice along.

June 5: Joe Harris, head groundskeeper at Doubleday Field in Cooperstown, calls to say that he spoke with a Clifton Park coach who had a game there and was admiring the conditions. He asked Joe for some help with their field project for the World Series and he offered that I was the person to talk to.

I followed up with the coach and he said he would pass the information along to Bruce Cramer, president of Clifton Park Baseball. I did not hear anything back from them so I wasn't sure the message got passed along. Meanwhile I was working on a utility vehicle deal with an old contact that was still involved with Clifton Park.

August 2, 10 AM: Received the call I had been expecting since February. Clifton Park Baseball was having some issues regarding the field rehabilitation and asked if I would meet

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The author's homemade tool that helps in getting a 1-inch drop per foot when completing the front of a new mound.

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them. With high temperatures having been in the nineties and dew points in the mid-seventies I fear the worst for their sod.

I thought it would be a good idea to take a look at conditions before the meeting. The sod was, much to my surprise, in great shape. There was a little unevenness one side, but overall a very good effort. Since my contact had led me to believe I was being called about the turf, not the skinned area, I was beginning to wonder why I was being called!

August 2, 7 PM: Met with Bruce Cramer. I said they did a very nice job on the sod replacement and the only potential issue he may have was bringing more infield material in to seal his new sod edges. Also, the entire infield skin needed to be raised about 2".

Then Bruce showed me some fairly coarse brick chips that he wanted to use for the infield surface. I said everyone would love the way it looked but it would play horribly. The coarseness would create bad hops and tear the kids up when they slid.

I suggested incorporating Soilmaster Select Infield Conditioner into his existing, locally blended infield mix. Also, the pitchers mound would have to be completely re-built. I offered to supply the infield conditioner and mound clay bricks and assist them with the project. (I own a home made tool that helps in getting the one inch drop per foot when completing the front of a new pitcher's mound.)

August 7: Confirmed with Bruce Cramer delivery of products and commencement of work for the following evening. Bruce informs me that his son, Bruce Jr., wants my job! An architecture major, Bruce and his father spent time with legendary groundskeeper George Toma in Fort Myers last spring so both are excited about field maintenance. Thank you, Reverend Toma!

August 8, 8 AM: Delivered 13 tons of Pro's Choice product, which was moved onto the infield skin by forklift. Ten skids were spaced from first to third. We are using 3/4" plywood to protect the newly installed bluegrass turf sod

(from Saratoga Sod Company in Stillwater, NY).

August 8, 6 PM: Soilmaster was spaced on infield surface and bags were cut open and emptied by parents and players. Soilmaster was blended into existing local infield mix by using two Toro Infield Pros with Rahn groomers. I had them water the infield skin area heavily. I plan on stopping in the morning to see what it looks like.

I told Bruce Jr. to pick out a stripe pattern for the infield turf that we would stick with for the entire tournament. It was almost like I gave him homework! I told keep it simple but I wanted a decision by tomorrow evening. I plan on leaving a Greensmaster 1600 to use for the entire tournament in order to give a professional look to this new diamond that is shaping up very nicely.

August 9, 9 AM: Met with Town of Clifton Park Buildings and Grounds Maintenance Director Mike Handrehan. Mike was impressed by how much we had accomplished the previous night. I also updated

Jerry Francis, Eastern New York State Babe Ruth & Cal Ripken Commissioner, on the progress made on the fields at Clifton Park. Jerry was working the Cal Ripken World Series at the Ripken Complex in Aberdeen, MD. Jerry asked if I could e-mail some pictures of the progress we are making so he could show them to the Babe Ruth officials who were with him there.

August 9, 6 PM: Installed Pro Mound bricks around home plate with members of the 15-year-old Clifton Park All-Star team. I requested a four way pitching rubber that I will fill with concrete since I don't like pitching rubbers to move around. I've always done it and had very good luck.

I blended the Soilmaster in the first base line as well as around the home plate area. Both first and third baselines and the home plate area have been made smaller for hand tool maintenance. No infield drag is narrow enough to groom these areas; they were designed intentionally to be maintained by hand tools only.

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How many youth league volunteers does it take to start a 3/4-ton walk behind vibratory roller? The correct answer is four!

How many youth league volunteers does it take to start a 3/4-ton walk behind vibratory roller? The correct answer is four! One to rev the truck up that the jumper cables are attached to. One to spray starting fluid into the intake of the engine. One to jump the starter solenoid with a screwdriver and one (me) to tap the starter with a hammer to entice the starter to engage the flywheel! After about 30 minutes we got the roller started and rolling on the infield skin and boy is everyone happy with the results. This field is really starting to shape up very nicely.

August 10, 6 PM: An abbreviated work night due to rain. We were able to bring most of the base material for the mound over the plywood protected new sod before it began to rain. I was also able to fill the inside of the pitching rubber with concrete. This will be ready to install Friday evening when I return to assist them. In the mean time they should keep adding base material to the mound area and compact with a tamper.



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Bruce Sr. & Jr. and I decided the mound height will be 10 inches though we might start a little bit higher to take settling into consideration. Bruce Jr. is set on moving the infield turf at 1.25". I told him this would be possible only if we are able to roll the new sod, now one month old, in order to make it smoother. After the tournament we would aerate the sod to alleviate any compaction caused by the roller and play.

When work is completed we will treat his turf with granular wetting agent and use Milorganite organic fertilizer with 4% iron content to give them the color that they are looking for.

August 11: We discovered the dimensions of the diamond were off. We had 90'5" home to first and 127'8" to second base. Mysteriously, home to third was a perfect 90 feet! Base anchor movement went better and quicker than expected. Bruce Jr., a few young lads and I were able to set home plate and clay brick the pitchers mound achieving the desired 1" drop per foot with my homemade mound gauge.

Bruce Jr. was unable to mow the straight line in the turf, which we had discussed earlier in the week. I had some fun with that! He hasn't yet shared his preferred mowing pattern with me.

Most of my work is done at this point. I will return later to apply granular wetting agent and organic fertilizer as soon as the game field is mowed down to 1.25". Not bad, a full 7 days to go before the tournament and the field could be made playable by morning.

August 13: Intended to stop, take a few pictures and make a quick getaway. Instead I spent about 4 hours helping to roll the infield turf and foul ground with the vibratory roller. Even though the sod was installed a little more than a month ago I felt a little nervous about rolling the turf but it was a trade off we had to make. It's the old athletic field dilemma: playability versus turf welfare! The unevenness of the newly installed turf necessitated the rolling.

Bruce Jr. will mow this evening at 1.5" with a rotary mower in two directions and then run a good watering since we started to see a little wilt in the afternoon. He confided in me that he was a little nervous about establishing a pattern and use of the walk behind greensmower overall. It seems as though just like professional sports can look somewhat easy on TV, professional grounds keeping can look easier than it is as well. At least until you try to do it!

August 14: Arrived at Clifton Commons to meet Bruce Jr. and establish a stripe pattern with the Greensmaster 1600, at a mowing height of 1.25". Applied Milorganite at the rate of 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Applied wetting agent at the rate of 3.5 pounds per 1,000 square feet. The wetting agent application was applied just in time as some localized dry spots were starting to form.

August 15: Blended some of their local infield mixture with the Soilmaster in some of the areas that needed tightening. We mowed the infield and foul ground areas at 1.25" twice. Painted outfield lines and chalked infield foul lines and batters boxes. At this point there was only one thing to say: "Play Ball!" ■

John Halloran is the commercial salesman for golf and grounds accounts in the Capital District Area for Grassland Equipment and Irrigation Corp., Lathan, NY. He has been an STMA member for 10 years and has been a long-time volunteer for area youth baseball leagues.

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