

George Mason TRIUMPHS in College Softball competition



Congratulations to George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, and its field grounds crew for winning the 2007 Sports Turf Managers Association's College Softball Field of the Year Award. Led by Josh McPherson, a Michigan State product whose early mentor was Boyd Montgomery, CSFM, last year's Harry C. Gill Memorial Award recipient, the crew includes Clint Steele, David Quinn, and Matt Carroll.

As director of turf management since 2005, McPherson oversees 18 acres of NCAA and recreation sports fields, as well as the 70-acre west campus complex. The winning field features Tuffcote bermudagrass overseeded with 10-15 lbs/1000 sq. ft. of Sunrise Primo ryegrass blend in a loamy sand mix rootzone.

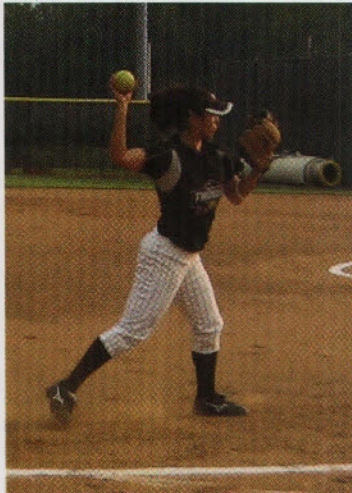
McPherson says when he first started managing the softball field it

was difficult to line up the foul lines with the poles and home plate; after measuring he discovered the bases and plate were off. So in the winter of 2006-2007 he and his crew fixed the problem, and also tackled the mound, which McPherson said had a hole after every game that would fit a basketball.

The mound area was excavated and rebuilt (using Hilltopper clay) and held up well the following season.

Due to tarp holes and the slope of the field, McPherson says sometimes they have to remove a lot of water from the field by digging holes, pushing the water into them, then pumping out the water. "We take pride in not canceling any games due to field condition," he says.

"We always have had difficulty managing this field in summer because there are only five irrigation heads that run through the center of the field and trees shade most of centerfield," McPherson says. "It was hard to get



George Mason in addition to practicing at the facility twice a week, and of course summer camps were also scheduled. "Many days the field was in use from 8 AM to 10 PM," McPherson says. "It was hard finding time to mow not to mention all the other maintenance needed."

"I was very proud of my staff; it's not easy giving up a summer for a rental group," he says. "But the team was appreciative of the effort; in fact, they collected enough money to pay for three of my staff to fly to Wisconsin for the championship games (which the Glory won)."

McPherson credits Clint Steele for the condition of the softball field. "I gave him a goal to get the field into shape and he did that, 'and then some'."

McPherson interview

SportsTurf: What channels of communication do you use to reach coaches and users of your facility? Any tips on getting good cooperation?

McPherson: One on one contact works best for me. In season I try to meet with the coaches several times a week. When they are out of season I talk with them less frequently. I also try to communicate with the same person on the coaching staff. When I communicate with different coaches sometimes you get different answers, so one point of contact is crucial.

green grass along the warning track and skin, which most summers didn't matter but last year our schedule picked up tremendously."

The National Pro Fastpitch league's new Washington DC franchise, the Glory, played 29 games at

SportsTurf: How did you get started in turf management? What was your first sports turf job?

McPherson: As a horticulture major I was required to take turf management at Michigan State. As soon as Trey Rogers started talking about the World Cup Silverdome project I started getting interested in sports-turf. I met my biggest influence, John Sorochan, later that week; he was a graduate student at MSU back then. His excitement and passion for

turf management left an impression on me. My first sports turf job was for Boyd Montgomery and Brian Hall at Pacesetter Park in Sylvania, OH. I later improved my skills as a turf manager at Virginia Tech with the help of Erik Ervin, Mike Goatley, Casey Underwood, and Jason Bowers.

SportsTurf: How do you balance your family life with work demands?

McPherson: When I first started at Mason I struggled with this. I was working many more hours than I should have. I put an emphasis on hiring more full time help, and was able to add

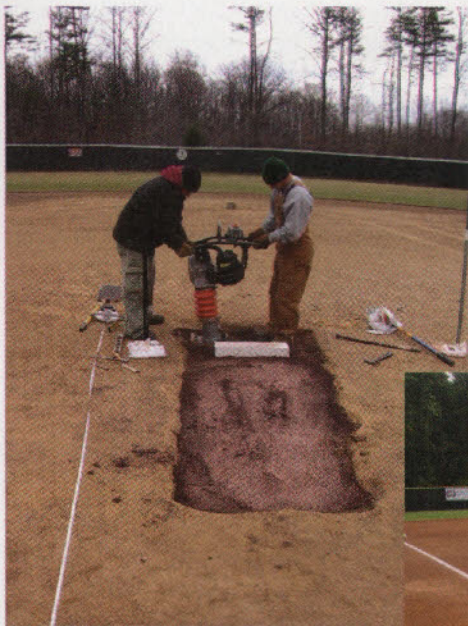
two more employees. This helped tremendously, especially in the spring season. It allowed flexibility with my employees to get some weekends off, especially for important weekends (weddings, birthdays, etc.). My wife Mindy is very understanding; she always puts it in perspective for me telling me it is just grass. I have a quality staff that can handle everything while I am gone and not have to call me. I have to thank David Quinn, Clint Steele, Matt Carroll, Mike Nunnally, Josh Richards, Elon Backer, and Tyler Youngs for everything they do. They are the reason everything looks so good here at Mason.

SportsTurf: Do you plan any adjustments, large or small, to your maintenance plan in 2008? Did you purchase any new equipment or product for this year?

McPherson: We are constantly experimenting with irrigation. I am currently working with Virginia Tech on ET-based irrigation. We want to see how little irrigation we can use and still have



FIELD OF THE YEAR



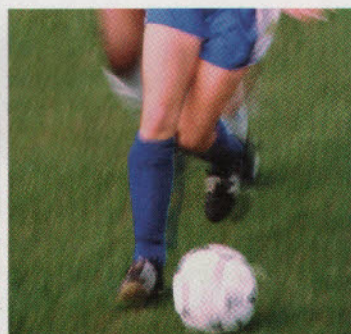
a great playing surface. I started using Polyon fertilizer last year and was very happy with its performance so I am going to adjust that slightly this year. I am also playing around with T-3 tetraploid ryegrass on my rec sports fields. I would like to purchase a turf vacuum and a mower this year. The vacuum would allow us to aerate more often.

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

McPherson: I love when people ask me if my fields are artificial or not. I know I have done a good job when they look and cannot tell if it is real or fake. Most of them can hardly believe that they are real and want to know if they can touch the field to confirm it. I also get pleasure from the athletes telling my staff how much they enjoy the fields.

SportsTurf: How do you see the sports turf manager's job changing in the future?

McPherson: Being environmentally friendly is very popular right now and I think we as turf managers need to show how we help the environment, not hurt it. We need to educate ourselves to see if there are things we can do differently to be more environmentally friendly. We need to be better prepared to answer questions like these in the future and be able to defend our industry. ■



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