



## Future Home of the Cleveland Indians Spring Training Ballpark



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# Tribe building new complex in Arizona

By Chris Harrison

**S**ome people want to live in a community built around a golf course. Goodyear, AZ is betting that people will want to live in a community built around a baseball field.

The Cleveland Indians are building a new stadium in Goodyear, a suburb of Phoenix on a 242-acre site about 30 miles west of downtown Phoenix. The 10,000-seat

stadium will be the centerpiece of a project called Ballpark Village.

Ground was broken in 2007 and the Indians hope to play at their new home starting next year, in the spring of 2009. That will make them the 13th team in the Cactus League.

In all, there will be six fields at Ballpark Village. "This isn't just a spring training facility," says Jim Folk, the Indians' vice president

of ballpark operations. He notes that the team will have a complete player development complex about a quarter-mile from the ballpark.

Folk says the complex will be used for instructional league play, rehabilitation for players, and as a facility where players can work on their skills during the off-season.

The vision, Folk continues, is that players will relocate to the area and be able to work at the facility with the Indians staff on a year-



round basis. It will be more convenient for the players. "It's a great opportunity for us to enhance player development," he says.

"We will have one practice field that will be virtually identical to Progressive Field (the team's home field in Cleveland)," Folk says. The other five fields will be standard ball fields. In addition, there will be batting tunnels, pitching mounds, agility fields and the workout and rehabilitation facilities that are part of a modern ball club.

#### Viewing the fields

The turf for the Stadium field and the practice fields is being grown by West Coast Turf Farms. It is a Tifway 419 bermudagrass.

Through the winter, the bermuda was dormant. However, they are taking bimonthly soil samples for analysis of the growing medium.

"Tifway normally goes dormant through the winter in Arizona," says Joe Traficano, sales manager for West Coast Turf's Arizona

operations. Tifway has been around for decades and is a proven sports field performer. It has a medium-fine texture, and rich dark green color. In addition to baseball fields, it commonly is used for golf course tees and fairways.

In the spring, when the grass comes back, it will be mowed every other day at a height of one-half inch.

The grass is fed via fertigation with some supplemental granular material based on soil test. "Typically, we'll use a 10-34-0 analysis and perhaps some 21-0-0 ammonium sulfate," Traficano continues. "It might be a bit different based on the soil test."

They also run close checks on the micronutrients like calcium, sodium, and magnesium.

While bermudagrass typically would be overseeded in the winter, that step was skipped this season since there is no need to keep the green color. "It will green up in the spring," Traficano says.

The grass should be ready for harvest by late April or very early May. The 419 has a dense, rapidly spreading growth habit. It is known as a tough, durable variety with quick recovery from injury. Other factors that account for its popularity in sports settings are its tolerance for close mowing and its disease resistance. Tifway 419 likes to be mowed at heights from 3/8 inch to 1 inch.

It thrives in full sun (in fact, it will not do well in shade).

While it does require a degree of maintenance, and will be highly maintained in the Stadium field, it will not break the budget for a city looking at a turf that will be both functional and economical.

Each of the fields is roughly two acres. When it comes time to harvest the sod, it will take about 2 days to harvest, deliver, and install sod for each field.

"We are planning on taking 2 weeks (to sod the ball fields)," Traficano says. The tim-

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West Coast Turf Farms is supplying the Tifway 419.

ing will actually depend on how quickly the rest of the project is completed. The turf installer is typically the last contractor on the job, following the sand, irrigation, and warning track installation. "We're the caboose of a big train," Traficano laughs. "But I want to be done by July so they can make their August turnover date."

A lot of preparation has gone into making it a success.

## Stadium design

The design work was done by HOK Sport, Kansas City, the same outfit that designed the team's Cleveland home, Progressive Field. Also on the design team was Terra Sport, Port Charlotte, FL. The general contractor on the job is Phoenix-based Barton-Alow.

"Our association with Progressive Field did not hurt any," acknowledges Brian Smith, senior associate with HOK Sport. "But the

project I would most liken this one to is the stadium in Surprise (Arizona) that we did for the Royals and Rangers 5 years ago."

There are differences between the Stadium field and the six practice fields, although the latter are all similar.

"The dimensions on the ballparks will be fairly generic," Smith continues. No effort made to design a field with any remarkable dimensions or construction differences.



"We were striving for a solid design," Smith says. "They are fairly prototypical in that there is nothing eye-catching about the fields."

There was still some question at press time as to whether the same sod will be used on all of the stadiums. "That would be the ideal situation," Traficano says, looking at both installation and on-going maintenance. "It makes sense to do that."

The Stadium field itself is designed to major league standards. There will be a 4-inch gravel drainage base with a perforated pipe under-drain system.

Above that is the 10-inch rootzone that will drain to the lower level.

"We'll skinny the rootzone to 8 inches on the practice fields," Smith says. The six full-size practice fields and the one half-field will otherwise be about the same as the Stadium field.

The two major league fields will be

reserved for use by the Indians year-round. The six practice fields will be for minor league and community use. There is no specific local commitment yet on those fields. At present, the city is hoping to use them for senior tournaments and community recreational use.

**"This isn't just a spring training facility."**

**— Jim Folk**

#### Beyond baseball

There is more than baseball at Ballpark Village. Spearheaded by the City of Goodyear, Ballpark Village will be a first of its kind mixed-use development anchored by the 10,000-seat ballpark and practice facilities for the Indians and, potentially, a second

Major League Baseball team. The first phase of the project will be the construction of the Spring Training ballpark and practice facilities. Subsequent phases will be private, mixed-use development including residential, retail, hotel, and conference facilities, and Class A office serving Phoenix area residents and visitors.

"The City is doing all of the heavy lifting on this project," Folk says. "Their people are terrific." Of course, the Indians have input into what happens at the ball field.

In a way, this move back to Arizona will be a homecoming for the Indians. They trained a bit farther south, in Tucson, until 1993. Their current spring home is in Winter Haven, FL. They moved there after the Homestead, FL, site they had built was destroyed by Hurricane Andrew.

A private consortium that includes Goodyear-based developer Rose Properties Southwest, LLC; the Wood family, fourth-



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Latest look at Goodyear project. Courtesy JMI Sports LLC.

generation owners of the underlying property; and San Diego-based JMI Sports LLC, received the green light to advance the design and construction of the Spring Training complex and surrounding private development. The City also authorized the issuance of up to \$10 million in bonds for ballpark development and approved a special use agreement with the Indians for 14 games to be played each season through 2029.

"There have been a number of successful field projects in the Cactus League that have been great for their communities," notes Erik Judson principal in JMI Sports. He points to Surprise and Peoria as two such projects. "The region has a long track record of successes," he continues.

JMI made its name in San Diego with the successful conception and implementation of master-planning the redevelopment of the surrounding neighborhoods when building PETCO Park. JMI was hired by the City of Goodyear to be the project manager.

Goodyear's own people will oversee the installation of the sod. They have experts on staff who are knowledgeable about bermudagrass in Arizona.

Upon installation, the sod will be one-half inch thick. "That is mostly root mass,"

Traficano says. The sod will be laid in strips 42-inches wide and 100 feet long. "That's 350-400 square feet," he continues.

To cover the 88,000 square feet will take about 200 rolls.

"We'll do the infield first," Traficano says. That is the toughest job since it has the most cuts. Then they will do the apron and finally will roll out the outfield.

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**"We want the base to be at field capacity...as close to flooding as we can get it."**  
— Traficano

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One thing Traficano demands is a wet sand base. "We want the base to be at field capacity . . . as close to flooding as we can get it," he says. This is to eliminate ruts from equipment in the base. Even a slightly dry sand base will even leave footprint marks that will disrupt the installation.

"That's the number one thing that can cause issues," Traficano says. Otherwise, he sees a typical installation.

Where this project is different, Judson

says, is that there will be more, higher-density development around the sports facility. Judson sees the likelihood of a couple of million square feet of office, entertainment, hotel and residential development over the coming many years.

"It's important to provide the amenities," Judson continues. "This will be a great civic gathering place for games, of course, but also for the rest of the year. The ballpark will be the catalyst for this."

The result, he predicts, will be a "cool, active environment."

"This speaks to the vision of the community of Goodyear," Judson says. "They are learning from the successes of other communities in the Valley of the Sun (Phoenix area) and are trying to improve upon that."

The field should be good for the Indians, too. In fact, Smith went out on a limb about the new design and said it "guarantees" that the Indians will win a World Series the season that they start practicing in the new facility.

"Tell Jim Folk he can take that to the bank," Smith laughs. ■

*Chris Harrison is a veteran free lance writer on turf issues.*