



C Isotopes Park in Albuquerque, NM won the 2007 STMA Professional Baseball Field of the Year this past January. Led by head groundskeeper Jarad Alley and his assistant Bryan Waller, the crew takes care of both the University of New Mexico Lobos baseball program as well as the Triple A affiliate of the Florida Marlins, the Isotopes of the Pacific Coast League. They also hosted last July's Triple A All-Star Fiesta, the state's high school baseball playoffs, and a high school all-star event, not to mention concerts, campouts, church services, corporate events, and softball games.

The Kentucky bluegrass (from Graff's Turf Farm in Colorado) field sits at an elevation of 5,102 feet; the desert climate poses numerous maintenance challenges, e.g., field temperatures during the season range from 40 degrees to more than 100 degrees. Spring and early summer bring winds that make keeping field moisture ideal a real challenge.

Rootzone is a 93-7 sand/peat mix (blended by Dakota Peat) and the irrigation system is Hunter with an ICC control clock with radio trans-

mission, a master valve, ICV valves, and a combination of I-20 and I-40 heads. The field also has 16 quick couplers strategically located for hand-watering and hydrojecting. Alley says this system allows him to apply water efficiently.

Because the crew must balance two team's full schedules, planning and execution are extremely important, says Alley. Communicating the balance of aesthetics, playability, and maintenance with the teams and front office is vital to accomplishing their goal of consistency and appearance.

Alley interview

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

Alley: I like to meet with all user groups before their event at Isotopes Park and try to use as much direct communication as possible. Field operations are more efficient when they know what I ask of them and when I know what they expect from the event.

FIELD OF THE YEAR



I also make sure to find the coaches and coordinators of the event to reiterate any important information for that day. I feel the key to getting cooperation is being able to understand a user group's wants and needs and being flexible to their ideas. This does not mean they should be allowed to take advantage of the turf manager or facility. A time always comes when you have to stand up for what is best for yourself and your field.

Try to pick the battles that are most important to you, the crew, and the field over the long term. If every idea and situation is confronted

with a negative attitude from the start, you will easily be labeled as the stereotypical "grumpy grass guy."

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

Alley: I was introduced to turf management during an internship for the Butte Copperkings. The staff was small and we didn't have a full-time grounds crew, so we all had to help out with the field and facility. My family had a small lawn care business while I was growing up, but I knew nothing about maintaining a baseball field. An interest was sparked, so I asked a lot of questions and paid attention to all of the details.

My first job in sports turf was with the Beloit Snappers. A big part of the reason I took that job was the Snappers' affiliation with the Brewers and it being only an hour drive to Milwaukee. I knew that if I ever needed any help or had any questions I could count on Gary Vanden Berg to help me in any way that he could. I was willing to move, work hard, and do whatever it took to become skilled at maintaining a baseball field. Looking back now, I learned a lot of what "not to do" that first full season in Beloit.

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

Alley: I have to give my wife Katie all the credit for this. Without her unconditional support and understanding I would not be able to do what I love for a living. It is very tough during the season, especially in

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April and May when we have either the Isotopes or the Lobos playing games almost every day. I do the best I can during the season and am getting better at taking more time for myself and my family during the offseason. I have learned that the job is more enjoyable when you take the time to “recharge the batteries” during the slow months and when you find time away from the park during the busiest months.

SportsTurf: Do you plan any adjustments to your maintenance plan

in 2008? Did you purchase any new equipment or product for this year?

Alley: I am planning on doing more deep solid tine aerification [1/2 x 6-inch+] during the season and pulling fewer cores. In the past we have cored up to three times during the season and with such a tight window for performing maintenance I feel like we have sometimes done more harm than good. We will pull cores once during the season (probably June based on our schedule) and then 1-2 times in the fall when the season is over.

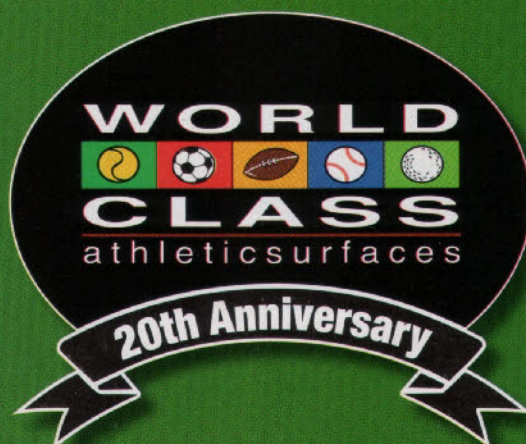
We will try to solid tine the field in March/April depending on weather, once in May and once in July. One of the core aerations during the fall (end of September) will be performed with 8 inches deep by 3/4-inch hollow tines. We have been using a Broyhill Stadium 80 sprayer, but will be working to upgrade to a more efficient option. We used more foliar applications last year and would like to continue that trend in 2008, but it will depend on the type of sprayer we are able to get approved.

SportsTurf: What’s the greatest pleasure you derive from your job? What’s the biggest headache?

Alley: I enjoy being outdoors, working with my hands, and have a passion for the game of baseball. This job allows me to combine all of those on a daily basis. In 8 years as a sports turf manager I have never agonized over going to work and think if you can achieve that in your profession it can only lead to happiness in your personal/family life.

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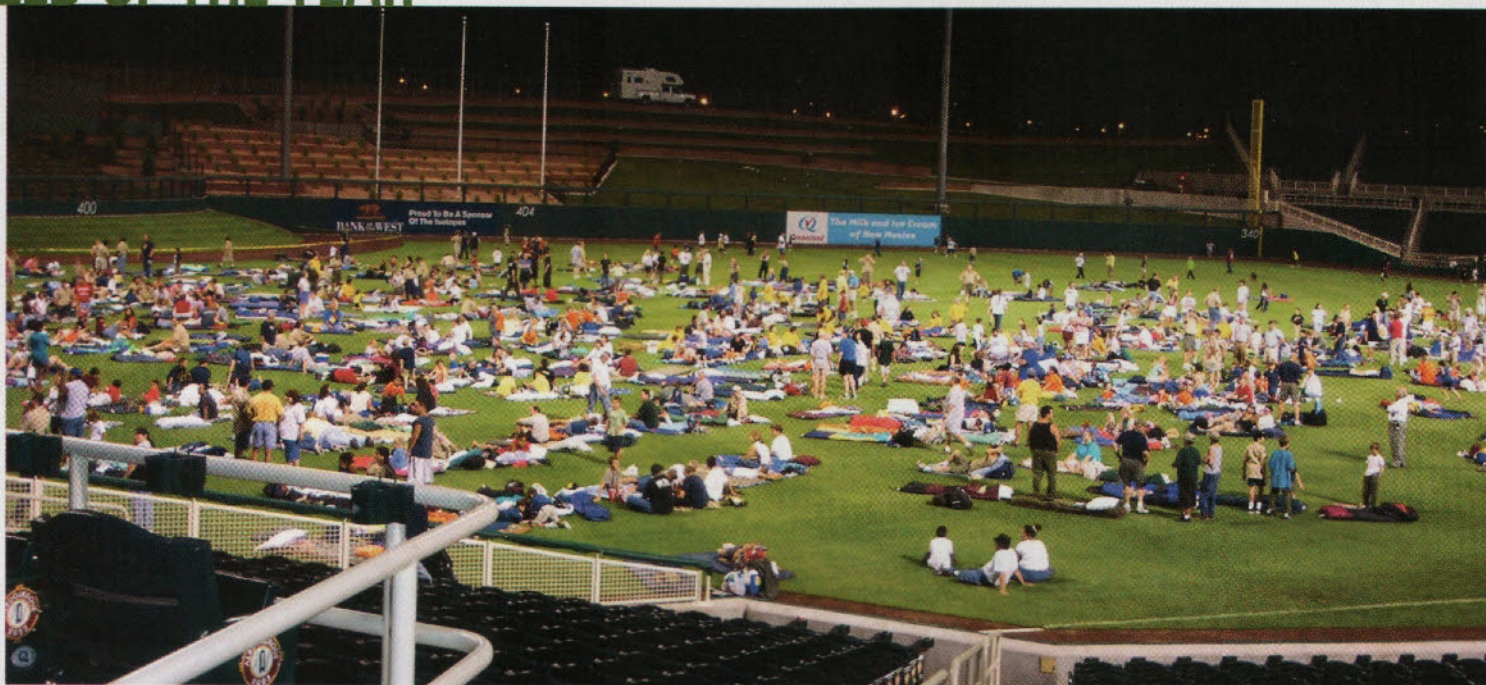
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FIELD OF THE YEAR



The biggest headache for baseball field managers is the weather. People always act as though we have control over it and/or have a magic

ball to determine and explain exactly what it will do at any given time. Also, we never seem to be pleased with what the weather is doing.

When the team is on the road we want it to rain (it doesn't), when the team is at home we want it dry (it rains), and no matter what the conditions are for the day when you pick up a hose the wind starts blowing—directly into your face no matter which direction you are facing.

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

Alley: I see the sports turf manager's job being more easily recognized as the professional position that it has become. As we continue to educate the people we work with and for, I feel that we will eventually get to a point where professionals are expected in all of these positions.

I hope to see the time where everyone can understand the importance of our knowledge and dedication to the sports that we service. Such as how people understand the importance of an emergency room doctor. Most people don't know what exactly an ER doctor does on an hourly or daily basis, but they do understand and respect just how critical they are to the medical profession.

The continued efforts of all sports turf managers will help to grow our profession into one that can be recognized as a necessity for sports of all levels and abilities. ■

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MONTHLY MAINTENANCE PROGRAM

January: Equipment maintenance; turf blankets on infield and aprons

February: Prep field for Lobo games; blankets off for games only

March: 2 lbs N/1000, .65 lbs P/1000, 5 lbs K/1000; blankets off for year
Overseed wear areas as needed; 1/2-ft. x 8-in. solid deep tine aeration and topdress

Mow infield at 1 in., outfield at 1.25 in.

April: 1 lb N/1000, .36 lb P/1000, 1.1 lbs K/1000

Spray Roots and Iron at 3 oz/1000

Core aerate field and topdress with 25 tons of sand

May: 1 lb N/1000, 2.1 lbs K/1000

Spray Roots and Iron at 3 oz/1000

Spray 7-0-1 and Iron at 3 oz/1000

Deep tine field (1/2-in. x 7-in. solids) and topdress

June: .55 lb N/1000, .25 lb P/1000, 1.75 lbs K/1000, .75 lbs Ca/1000, .25 lbs Mg/1000

Spray AgriPlex and Iron at 3 oz/1000

Spray Roots and Iron at 3 oz/1000

Core aerate entire field and topdress (30 tons sand)

July: .65 lb N/1000, 1.25 lb K/1000, 1 lb Mg/1000

Perk (4-0-10) at 1 lb Fe/1000

Spray Roots and Iron at 3 oz/1000

Spray 7-0-1 and Iron at 3 oz/1000

Deep tine field (1/2-in. x 6-in. solids) and topdress

August: .75 lb N/1000, 1 lb K/1000

Spray AgriPlex and Iron at 3 oz/1000

Spray Roots and Iron at 3 oz/1000

September: .92 lb N/1000, .24 lb K/1000, 1 lb K/1000

Spray AgriPlex and Iron at 3 oz/1000

Spray Roots and Iron at 3 oz/1000

Overseed infield, aprons, and poa spots

Topdress (10 tons sand)

Wash out all edges

Overseed landscape areas

October: 2 lbs N/1000, 1 lb P/1000, 3 lbs K/1000

Spray Roots and Iron at 3 oz/1000 (twice)

Laser grade infield and warning track

Deep tine field (3/4-in. x 8-in. cores) and topdress (60 tons)

Renovate all mounds

Raise mowing height to 1.75 in.

November: 1.5 lbs N/1000, .5 lb P/1000, 3 lbs K/1000

Spray Roots and Iron at 3 oz/1000

December: Turf blankets on

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