

FIELD OF THE YEAR

“Finest pitch in America” wins Pro Soccer category

DAVID MOYES, head coach of the English Premier League's Everton Football Club, said it best: “Dick's Sporting Goods Park is the finest pitch in all the places I've been in America so far. The pitch here is magnificent. Some of the places we've been in America, they don't treat their pitch right . . . here they have American football lines, they have concerts on the field. But [Dick's] is the finest set-up I've been to and

we've been coming to America for the past 5 years. You guys should be really proud.”

Dick's Sporting Goods is billed as “the world's largest and most state of the art professional stadium and fields complex” and is composed of the 18,000-seat home stadium of the Colorado Rapids and its surrounding 24-field, fully-lit soccer complex. Dick's Sporting Goods



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Monthly maintenance and fertility program

January

Field dormant

February

Turn on field heat and cover field.

March

Verti-cut field in one direction. Aerate with 5/8-inch tines on 2 x 2-inch centers. Drag in cores, sweep tufts. Topdress field at rate of 10 tons of sand per acre. Apply gypsum and humates at the rate of 15 lbs/1,000 sq. ft. Apply 1 lb. N with organic fertilizer. Apply ½ lb. N with a methylene urea-based fertilizer. Spray field with micronutrients, soil amendment, amino acids, and wetting agent.

April

Apply ½ lb. N with a meth-

ylene urea-based fertilizer. Spray field with micronutrients, soil amendment, amino acids, and wetting agent.

May

Apply ½ lb. N with a methylene urea-based fertilizer. Spray field with micronutrients, soil amendment, amino acids, and wetting agent.

June

Apply insecticide for grub control. Apply ½ lb. N with a methylene urea-based fertilizer. Spray field with micronutrients, soil amendment, amino acids, and wetting agent.

July

Apply broad spectrum fungicide. Apply ½ lb. N with a methylene urea-based fertilizer. Spray field with micronutri-

ents, soil amendment, amino acids, and wetting agent.

August

Apply ½ lb. N with a methylene urea-based fertilizer. Spray field with micronutrients, soil amendment, amino acids, and wetting agent.

September

Aerate with 5/8-inch tines on 2 x 2-inch centers. Drag in cores, sweep tufts. Topdress field at rate of 10 tons of sand per acre. Apply ½ lb. N with a methylene urea-based fertilizer. Spray field with micronutrients, soil amendment, amino acids, and wetting agent.

October

Apply ½ lb. N with a methylene urea-based fertilizer. Spray field with micronutri-

ents, soil amendment, amino acids, and wetting agent. Apply gypsum and humates at the rate of 15 lbs/1,000 sq. ft.

November

Apply ½ lb. N with a methylene urea-based fertilizer. Spray field with micronutrients, soil amendment, amino acids, and wetting agent.

December

Apply 1 lb. N with 21-0-0 as a dormant feeding. Apply fungicide for snow mold protection.



The same crew that takes care of our stadium field is also responsible for the rest of the complex which includes a sand-based practice field, two synthetic fields, and 21 native soil fields.

Park's 917-acre site is a public-private partnership between Kroenke Sports Enterprises and Commerce City. The site also hosts the brand new city offices of Commerce City, lots for retail outlets, offices for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and a new visitors' and educational center for the Rocky Mountain Arsenal Wildlife Refuge, among other entities.

Michigan State turf management product Bret Baird runs the show, along with his assistants Phil McQuade and Dean Pearson. Manuel Garcia is the irrigation systems maintenance tech and Torrey Batts is the turf equipment tech.

Baird began his turf career working under STMA Board member Troy Smith, CSFM, at the Denver Broncos training center and there also learned from turf icon Ross Kurcab, CSFM at Invesco Field at Mile High. He was hired in 2006 by Kroenke Sports Enterprises where supervised construction and departmental start-up for the Dick's Sporting Goods field and complex. The field was completed in April 2007.

The field is 100% Kentucky bluegrass featuring these varieties: Brilliant, North Star, Moonlight, and Blackstone. It features a SubAir forced hot air system and the drainage is perforated pipe consisting of 6-inch pipes on 10-foot centers.

From Baird's award entry: "Our largest challenge this year has been budget cuts. Our overall budget was cut considerably; the hardest hit has been zero tolerance for overtime. We have to find ways to get all of our work done in 40 hours where last year (2007) we could have all the overtime we wanted. Where this gets difficult is during a game week. I need to have a minimum of three people here to get the field prepared for a game. If the game is on a weekend, which almost all of them are, I have to comp time during the week. On an average game week I have to comp at least three people a full day. This takes away almost 25% of my crew to get the rest of the complex ready for the weekend's events.

"But year in and year out our largest challenge is keeping this field in the best possible condition while also taking care of the rest of the complex. The same crew that takes care

of our stadium field is also responsible for the rest of the complex which includes a sand-based practice field, two synthetic fields, and 21 native soil fields. It can become very difficult scheduling daily task and prioritizing what, when, and what order things need to be done. We need to decide who needs to complete tasks and make sure they are trained on the machinery, processes, and reasoning of why things need to be done in the way and the order they are done.

"On the outer fields we host a variety of sports including soccer, football, lacrosse, rugby, Gaelic games, countless camps and tournaments. All these events require their specific lines and layouts that also take quite a bit of time to prepare. This past July (2008) was the first Mile High Music Festival, a week-long load-in that included five stages and two tents that were [huge]. There were more than 90,000 attendees over 2 days with no field protection. We had to turn off the irrigation for 5 days and it reached 100 degrees each day.

"Needless to say, we had 10 days of renovations on the outer fields to get them back in shape for play 3 weeks later. With all the work we need to perform on the outer fields throughout the year, we need to be very careful with our scheduling to make sure the stadium does not suffer and gets all the care it needs."

SportsTurf: How has the recession affected your operations?

Baird: Two years ago my budget was cut pretty hard so the recession has not affected our operation in that way too much but I have noticed we are having more and more events in our stadium to get people in here than we were before.

ST: What changes to your maintenance plans are you expecting to make this year, if any?

Baird: I have started using a growth regulator this year in an effort to reduce clippings which will slow the effects of the slime layer on top of our sand since I do not catch any of my clippings. The other thing we are really incorporating this year is a lot more solid tine aerifications. With so many events

and mowing so often for aesthetics we are seeing a lot of positive results from the less invasive solid time aerification.

ST: What's the best piece of turf management advice you have ever received?

Baird: Nobody cares about your field as much as you do so don't take it personally when things don't go exactly the way you want.

ST: How do you balance your work and personal time?

Baird: I have complete confidence in my assistants, Phil McQuade and Dean Pearson. I trust them to work any event and that allows me time away.

ST: How do you handle all the different events that your field sees? How does it affect your approach, maintenance-wise or preparation-wise, if at all?

Baird: It seems like when you have all of these different events you just get it done and afterward you wonder how you did it. We basically have a set program for our field that we follow no matter what event is coming. The only things we really have to change are watering, mowing, and staffing schedules. The event load also dictates our aerification program. When we have a long enough window open we will hollow time aerate and topdress. If the windows are not long enough and we have compaction to alleviate, we will solid time aerate.

ST: What do you see yourself doing 10 years from now?

Baird: In 10 years I will probably be doing the same thing I am doing now but be a lot older and a lot grayer! ■

The STMA Field of the Year Awards Program has been made possible through the generous support of its sponsors. They include: Carolina Green Corp.; Covermaster, Inc.; Hunter Industries; Turface Athletics/Profile Products, LLC; Scotts Professional Seed; and World Class Athletic Surfaces.