



Maintaining turf at small schools

Q. What's the ultimate complement given to the grounds keeper?

A. If the opposing team offers to hire you or if their players dance on your mid-field logo—Hey, they noticed your field!

I am the maintenance supervisor for Capitan Municipal Schools. Capitan is a small farming and ranching community located in southern New Mexico between the Sacramento and Capitan Mountains. Our approximate population is 1,500. The school district has about 490 students enrolled in K-12.

Among my many duties is preparing the football field for our teams home games. This is truly my favorite chore. Our field is used daily for varsity and junior high practices, youth league, band practice, and P.E. classes. For our tiny village to have a "pro football" look for the field on Friday night requires many factors. First is that our superintendent and school board support me with time and a budget. Secondly, our groundskeeper, Mike Pumphrey, who helps with the basics, and third a field manager, me, with time, desire, vision, knowledge of turf, artistic talent, and a bit of EGO!

Weather watching is important in preparing the football field. We have dry windy springs, and wet summers, with August and September being very unpredictable. I need to plan in advance to have the playing field ready for the football season.

The preparation begins in the spring and means dethatch, aerify, reseed, fertilize, irrigate and much more. The field must be tough enough to endure an entire football season as there is very little window of opportunity for preparation. The field includes 10 percent creeping red fescue, 25 percent perennial rye grass, and 65 percent triathlon tall fescue. I usually fertilize with slow release pellets to extend the feed for 6 weeks because of time issues. Frequent mowing allows easier turf management and I use a John Deere Z Trac because it is fast.

This is what is required to prepare the field on game week:

- Mow to 2 inches on Tuesday
- Paint perimeter lines (twice) on Wednesday
- Paint yard lines on coach boxes on Thursday
- Paint hash marks and numbers on Friday

When all of the required markings are done, the artistic preparation

Left: I incorporate school colors on the numbers, sidelines, and a small portion of the endzone using aerosol cans with a cart and pistol.

comes into play! Meanwhile, varsity, junior high, and the youth league continue to use the field for practice. Most of the time, when I am prepping the football field, I am frequently called away to take care of other important issues that distracts and interrupts my already busy schedule.

As I discovered early in my career, much of what I do on the field cannot be seen from our bleachers. I use the 50-yard line as my main attraction. I incorporate our school colors on the numbers, sidelines, and a small portion of the end zone by using aerosol cans with a cart and pistol, which is easy to clean up. I do not like using stencils, so my “tiger head” team logo basically is done free hand.

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As the season wears on, I can only irrigate and mow. I usually fertilize in late September and by then the grass begins to show its wear. An old groundkeeper saying is “Grass grows by the inch and is killed by the foot.” As it begins to lose color, especially after cold nights, I am required to add more color to the field for it to look right.

So why do all this? In a small community such as Capitan, Friday night football is an important source of entertainment. I enjoy doing the art work and I like to make it special for the students as well as the community. Our football players love it and it inspires them to play better.

Even though preparing the football field is part of my job, I thoroughly enjoy painting the football field. Maybe someday I will be doing field art work for my grandkids.

It is almost kick off time so I have to put up the flags and get the P.A. system and scoreboard ready for game time.

Thanks to Mrs. Woods’ Multimedia Basics class for making time to take pictures and edit this article. The class includes Jared Black, Brooke Ceballos, Sara Rush, Adrienne Ramirez, Lacy Walker and Julian Washington. ■

Nick R. Pacheco is maintenance supervisor for the Capitan (NM) Municipal Schools.



Nick Pacheco poses on his pride and joy with Capitan players Andrew Chavez, left, and Lawrence Whipple.



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Pacheco paints this logo by hand.