

FIELD OF THE YEAR



DeWitt, Tribble lead Yellow Jackets to Field of the Year Award



RUSS CHANDLER STADIUM at Georgia Tech and groundskeepers Jon DeWitt and Todd Tribble won the 2008 STMA College Baseball Field of the Year Award. (Tribble has since become the athletic turf superintendent at Oklahoma State University.)

Russ Chandler is located on the historic Rose Bowl Field on the Georgia Tech campus in downtown Atlanta and features great views of the city's skyline. The stadium has been the home field of Yellow Jacket baseball for more than 70 years. It is named for A. Russ Chandler III, a major supporter of the college's baseball program, who funded construction of the first grandstand for the ballpark in 1985. Fans of the team still call the stadium "The Rusty C" due to its historically extensive use of aluminum in construction, though the current version was rebuilt in 2002 and features much more brick than aluminum.

Here, in the words of Tribble, is how he and DeWitt handled the record drought that plagued the southeast in the past few years:

"In early 2007, the southeastern United States was stricken with a drought as devastating as any on record, one so bad that residents of Atlanta faced the possibility of a drinking water shortage. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division declared a level four drought status for Atlanta and all counties within the vicinity in September, 2007. This declaration prohibited outdoor watering of any sort.

"For turf managers in the area, this meant all watering via irrigation was halted unless a product label specifically instructed irrigation following application. With overseeding of perennial ryegrass scheduled for early October, our crew was forced to rely upon rainfall to begin the germination process. Thus began our search for inventive ways to get water to the desiccated turf.

"We were initially able to borrow a truck that the landscape division of Georgia Tech was using to water trees and flowers around campus. The water was supplied by holding tanks that captured air conditioning condensate at one of the campus' larger buildings. We used this method to irrigate by hand twice until temperatures dropped, thus limiting the condensate being produced by the air conditioners.

"We then learned of a natural spring running directly underneath our football stadium that was collecting into an abandoned sewer line then pumped into a storm drain. We began the process of redirecting that water into seven 1,500-gallon holding tanks underneath our football stands. From there, we pumped the water into a 500-gallon tank pulled by a John Deere Pro-Gator to be used at the baseball facility across campus. The only way to then apply the water to the field was through fire hoses connected to the tank.

"Application of the spring water to the baseball field began after the football season concluded in late November. Because the turf was exceptionally dry from minimal rainfall, we initially soaked the profile until there was standing water. On a daily basis during late November/early December, a member of our staff operated the water trailer for the duration of the day to get the rye established. Two thousand gallons of water was required for the infield alone, while both sides of foul territory required 1,500 gallons. Each tank of water lasted approximately 20 minutes, with the fill-up process at the football stadium being an additional 40 minutes. We ran the water rig for up to 6 hours a day once the temperatures rose into the upper 80's in May.

"Having no overhead irrigation system affected our fertilization program greatly. We had to time all of our granular applications around natural rainfall. Because the infield and foul territory were the easiest to hand water, we

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could fertilize those areas and then follow with our tank system. As a supplement to the granular applications, we relied heavily upon liquid applications just before weekend series to maximize effectiveness. Hundreds of feet of hose were pulled weekly to accomplish this time consuming task, but our dedicated staff was up to the challenge.”

SportsTurf: What’s the most important piece of equipment or product in your program?

DeWitt: I think my mowers; everything one does to make the grass shine can be for nothing if your cutting units are not dialed in and perfect.

ST: What are your biggest challenges and how do you approach them?

DeWitt: On a regular basis user traffic is probably the biggest challenge; however, this last year’s drought was the toughest working conditions I have experienced. Letting user groups know that there is a strong relationship between use and end quality, and that ultimately there is a threshold at which quality will be affected by overuse [also is challenging].

We take steps to protect wear areas by using covers whenever feasible. We also try to have someone on site for any event so that we can control how the fields are used and then jump on post-event maintenance

quickly to minimize damage and maximize recovery time.

ST: How do you communicate with management and field users?

DeWitt: It depends on the user. You learn whether phone, email or in person suits the relationship you have with a particular user. How serious the issue is also affects which form of communication is most appropriate for the particular situation. In person is great, but it is not always practical because of my own schedule, much less a coach’s. Email is great for simple operations items because it is the fastest and easiest while also providing documentation for all parties involved.

ST: What’s the best piece of turf management advice you’ve ever received?

DeWitt: “KIS”—Keep It Simple.

ST: How do you keep your “engine” charged to do your best every day?

DeWitt: Coffee? What keeps any turf manager going; you’re either passionate about this line of work or you would move on to something else. Certainly by the end of football or baseball season you’re ready for it to be over, but generally speaking every day is an adventure.

ST: How do you balance work and personal life?

DeWitt: I try to make the most out of off peak work times to spend with family and sacrifice any personal hobbies for family time. I can pursue my own interests after the kids are grown. ■

Georgia Tech Baseball monthly maintenance and fertility program

June----- Mow 3 days per week @ 1/2”
 • Edge 2x/month
 • Spray Monument @15g/Acre with Duplex @1oz/1000ft2
 • Verti-cut in 2 directions, sweep
 • Fert 19-19-19 (1lb/1000ft)
July----- Mow 5 days per week @1/2”
 • Edge 2x/month
 • Aerate, sweep
 • Fert 34-0-0 (1lb/1000ft2)
 • Spray Launch @32oz/1000ft2
 • Spray Cascade @2.5 gals/1000ft and Duplex @ 1oz/1000ft2
 • Fert 34-0-0 (1.5 lbs/1000ft2)
August----- Mow 5 days per week @1/2”
 • Edge 2x/month
 • Spray Magnus @4oz/1000ft2 and Duplex @ 1oz/1000ft2
 • Spray Ultraplex @2oz/1000ft, Nublade @3oz/1000ft2, Launch@32oz/1000ft2
 • Aerate, sweep
 • Solu-Cal 3 tons
 • Fert 16-4-8 (1lb/1000ft2)
September- Start of fall practice
 • Mow 5 days per week @ 9/16”
 • Edge 2x/month
 • Spray Heritage @ 3oz/1000ft2
 • Spray Nutra-Green@3.5oz/1000ft2, Ultraplex @ 2.5oz/1000ft2
 • Spray Banner Max @ 2oz/1000ft2
 • Fert 9-18-17 @1lb/1000ft2
October----- Mow 5 times per week @ 9/16”
 • Edge 2x/month
 • Overseed with Perennial Ryegrass @20lbs/1000ft2, topdress, drag in seed/sand
 • Spray Heritage@2oz/1000ft2
 • Fert 17-0-17 @0.5 lb/1000ft2
November-- Mow 3 times per week @3/4”
 • Edge 2x/month
 • Begin hand watering entire field for rye grass

germination with 500 gal pull behind tank
 • Add 25 tons infield mix, till, lasergrade, roll infield skin areas
 • Spray 5oz/1000ft Essential, 6oz/1000ft2 PK Plus and Nutra Green, 3oz/1000ft2 Ultraplex
 • Fert 13-0-0 @ 1lb/1000ft2
December-- Mow 3 times per week @3/4”
 • End of fall practice
 • Edge 2x/month
 • Hand water entire field with 500 gal pull behind tank
 • Fert 13-2-13 @1/3lb/1000ft2
 • Spray 2oz/1000ft Ultraplex, 5 oz/1000ft2 Essential, 5oz/1000ft2 Nutra Green
 • Rebuild game mound, plate and bullpens
 • Spray Cleary’s 3336 @6.5oz/1000ft2
January--- Mow 3 times per week @3/4”
 • Begin spring practice
 • Edge 2x/month
 • Hand water as needed with 500 gal pull behind tank
 • Spray Daconil @5.5oz/1000ft2 and Subdue@1oz/1000ft2
 • Fert 13-2-13 @1/3lb/1000ft2
 • Fert 11-3-22 IBDU @1/2lb/1000ft2
February-- Mow 5 times per week @3/4”
 • Edge every week
 • Hand water entire field with 500 gal pull behind tank
 • Spray Subdue @ 1oz/1000ft2
 • Spray 34-0-0@.125lbs/1000ft2, Hydro Grow@2lbs/Acre, Mn@1oz/1000ft2, Ultraplex@2oz/1000ft
 • Sul Po Mag @300lbs/Acre
 • Fert 13-2-13@1/4lb/1000ft2
 • Spray Heritage@2oz/1000ft2
 • Spray Zerotel @11.5oz/1000ft2
 • Spray Gary’s Green @4oz/1000ft2, Ferromec@2 oz/1000ft2 and Ultraplex@2.5oz/100ft2

March----- Mow everyday @ 3/4”
 • Edge every week
 • Hand water entire field with 500 gal pull behind tank
 • Spray Banol @2oz/1000ft and Fungo-Flo at 4oz/1000ft2
 • Solid tine infield and foul territory, core out field
 • Fert with 13-0-0 @ 1/2 lb/1000ft2
 • Spray Magnus @4oz/1000ft2 and Duplex @ 1oz/1000ft2
 • Spray Subdue@1oz/1000ft and 26GT@4oz/1000ft2
 • Wash edges of infield mix/calced clay
 • Aerate wear areas with solid tines, seed wear areas, topdress
April----- Mow everyday @3/4”
 • Edge every week
 • Hand water entire with 500 gal pull behind tank
 • Spray Heritage @1.5oz/1000ft2
 • Spray Magnus @ 4oz/1000ft2 and Duplex @ 1 oz/1000ft2
 • Fert 16-4-8 @1/2lb/1000ft2
 • Spray Suprema @7oz/1000ft2, TuffTurf and Ultraplex@2.5 oz/1000ft2
 • Core aerate infield and outfield, seed wear areas, topdress
 • Install new pitching rubber on game mound
 • Add clay to back arc of infield, front edge of home plate, baselines, cutouts
May----- Mow everyday @3/4”
 • Edge every week
 • Wash edges of infield mix and calced clay
 • Hand water entire field with 500 gal pull behind tank
 • Core aerate, seed wear areas, topdress
 • Spray Subdue @1oz/1000ft2 and Fungo Flo@4oz/1000ft2
 • Spray Suprema @7oz/1000ft2, TuffTurf and Ultraplex@2.5 oz/1000ft2
 • Fert 16-4-8 @ 1lb/1000ft2