

# FIELD OF THE YEAR



## Johnson, Warczak have Timber Rattlers shakin' good

**T**IME WARNER CABLE FIELD at Fox Cities Stadium, Appleton, WI won the 2008 STMA Professional Baseball Field of the Year Award this past winter. Justin Johnson, director of stadium operations, and head groundskeeper Eddie Warczak led the winning effort, assisted by crew members Adam Brown, Matt Andrews, Will Granderson and Derek Loda. [Ed's note: Johnson now works for the Omaha Royals.]

In addition to being home of the Single A Midwest League Wisconsin Timber Rattlers (Brewers affiliate), Time Warner Cable Field hosted events in 2008 ranging from the NCAA Division III World Series to a Trace Adkins concert, with plenty of high school

and Legion games, camps, tryouts and charity events mixed in between.

Johnson, replaced by Warczak when he moved upstairs as director of stadium operations, has his bachelor's in agronomy from the University of Nebraska and oversaw the 2006 renovation of the then-12-year-old field, with assistance from crew member Warczak. The two recalled in their Field of the Year entry how they dealt with the Wisconsin weather last year:

"The Timber Rattlers are the northernmost team in the Midwest League, meaning we're still dealing with winter weather at the start of the season. We had received 96 inches of snow [that] winter, more than average, so that set the stage for a challenging pre-season.



“One month before our first event there were 8-foot snow drifts on the field. Most of that melted but a cold snap 2 weeks before the first event turned what remained into a layer of ice.

“With a week to go before the season started, and the forecast looking grim, we spread a thick layer Milorganite (20 lbs/1,000 sq. ft.) to help melt the ice and warm up the soil, then we removed the rest of the snow. The infield skin, baselines, home plate area, and warning track were tilled up and left to dry, then we rolled and graded these areas. We removed the tarps from the mound and bullpens to start those areas drying. A plate compactor was used to firm up the clay, followed by height and slope corrections. We managed to squeeze all preparations into 7 days of heavy work to have the field ready for the team’s April 1 workout.

“Unfortunately this was only the start of what the weather had in store for us this year. The team opened the season on the road while the weather in Appleton was 60 degrees and sunny, great weather for us in early April since our average temperatures that time of year are more like 45 degrees. When the team returned, the cold weather came with them. The Opening Day high was 48 degrees and that was the warmest day of the week. We played all nine innings that day but the next five games were cancelled due to rain, snow or cold.

“The cold weather and snow caused many headaches however they were not our only concerns [last] year. After the snow came the rain;

we reached our yearly average rainfall by the beginning of August. We pulled the tarp 41 times this season, which was at least down from the 54 times we’d pulled it the previous season.

“Poor drainage in the outfield compounded the challenges that come with the rain. We had to be creative in order to maximize the drainage we did have. The tarp emptied to all fields this year instead of just right field. We worked to aerify as much as possible and deep-tined once to allow the water to infiltrate quicker and deeper into the soil profile. With the addition of drainage to the outfield [in the fall of 2008], we are hopeful it will greatly increase the amount of rain the field sustains without compromising the safety of our players.”

**ST:** What are you doing now to hold down costs in the economy?

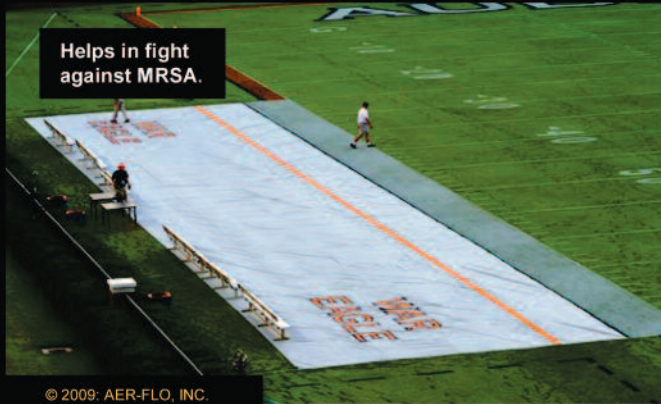
**Warczak:** Fortunately this year the organization hasn’t felt the effects of the bad economy. I do however have to keep a closer watch on employee hours, as well as this year’s budget.

**ST:** Are you changing anything this year in your maintenance? Why?

**Warczak:** I was extremely pleased with last year’s results, however there’s always room for improvement so we’ll make some minor changes.

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

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# FIELD OF THE YEAR



**Warczak:** I've received a lot of great advice from a variety of people. In particular, my previous boss Justin Johnson taught me a lot. The best piece of advice he gave would have to be, "Do it right the first time."

**ST:** What are your specific responsibilities?

**Warczak:** My general responsibility is to maintain the field, as well as the outside landscape. I coordinate the schedules and job duties for the grounds crew, prepare the field for games, and oversee the events that take place on the field. I also work with the coaching staff's team schedule to know when we need to set things up. Other responsibilities would include coordinating tarp pulls, along with a variety of other day-to-day tasks.

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

**Warczak:** The beginning of the season is always difficult with the cold and unpredictable weather. Luckily by the end of spring we have a full grounds crew and we fall into a routine. We also try to have fun to keep ourselves sane during the season.

**ST:** How do you balance work and personal life?

**Warczak:** During the season it can be difficult, but I have a great family and girlfriend that understand my busy schedule. Despite the amount of hours I work I always try to make time for family and friends.

**ST:** What are your favorite things to do off the job?

**Warczak:** Even off the job I enjoy being outside. My favorite things to do, especially during the off-season is hunt and fish. When I'm not hunting or fishing, the off days give me time to hang with my friends and family. ■



## Time Warner Cable Field Maintenance Program

<b>January</b>	Building maintenance Stadium projects Snow removal
<b>February</b>	Building maintenance Stadium projects Snow removal
<b>March</b>	Building maintenance Stadium projects Snow removal Prepare stadium for season Turn on irrigation system and test Check height of cut and reel adjustments on equipment Field preparation: dry everything out, check height and slope of mound and bullpens Start fertility program
<b>April</b>	Games and events begin Continue fertility program Aerate with solid tines Overseed and topdress Begin mowing; at beginning of month mow as often as needed, near end of month 3x/week Edge 1x/week Toward end of month begin berm seating area mowing 1x/week, clippings are removed
<b>May</b>	Mow every game day and every other non-game day Continue fertility program with two additional applications of GroPower 0-0-10 at 1 lb./1,000 sq. ft. Prepare field for NCAA Div. III World Series Check mound and bullpen heights and slopes Aerate 2x with solid tines; once before World Series, once after Edge 1x/week Begin mowing program for common areas and outside landscaping 1x/week Clean outside landscape beds and mulch
<b>June</b>	Mow every game day and every other non-game day Continue fertility program with two additional applications of GroPower 0-0-10 at 1 lb./1,000 sq. ft. Check mound and bullpen slopes Aerate with solid tines before State HS tournament Aerate, pulling cores and removing them Topdress with sand after removing cores Edge 1x/week Outside landscape and berm mowing program continued
<b>July</b>	Mow every game day and every other non-game day Continue fertility program with two additional applications of GroPower 0-0-10 at 1 lb./1,000 sq. ft. Check mound and bullpen slopes Aerate with solid tines Edge 1x/week Outside landscape and berm mowing program continued Stadium playground is mulched
<b>August</b>	Mow every game day and every other non-game day Continue fertility program with two additional applications of GroPower 0-0-10 at 1 lb./1,000 sq. ft. Check mound and bullpen slopes Aerate with solid tines Edge 1x/week Outside landscape and berm mowing program continued
<b>September</b>	Season ends; mow 3x/week Continue fertility program with one application of GroPower 0-0-10 at 1 lb./1,000 sq. ft. Aerate with hollow tines; remove cores Overseed field Topdress with sand after cores are removed and field overseeded Check height, slope and table of mound and bullpens; cover for winter Strip the infield conditioner Edge 1x/week Outside landscape and berm mowing program continued Field projects Stadium projects
<b>October</b>	Mow as needed, usually 2x/week Fertility program continued Outside landscape and berm mowing program cut to 1x/2 weeks Outside landscape work includes pruning trees and cutting back shrubs and flowers Field projects Stadium projects Prepare stadium for winter
<b>November</b>	Mow if necessary Mow outside landscape and berm if necessary Prepare stadium for winter Stadium projects Snow removal
<b>December</b>	Stadium projects Take vacation