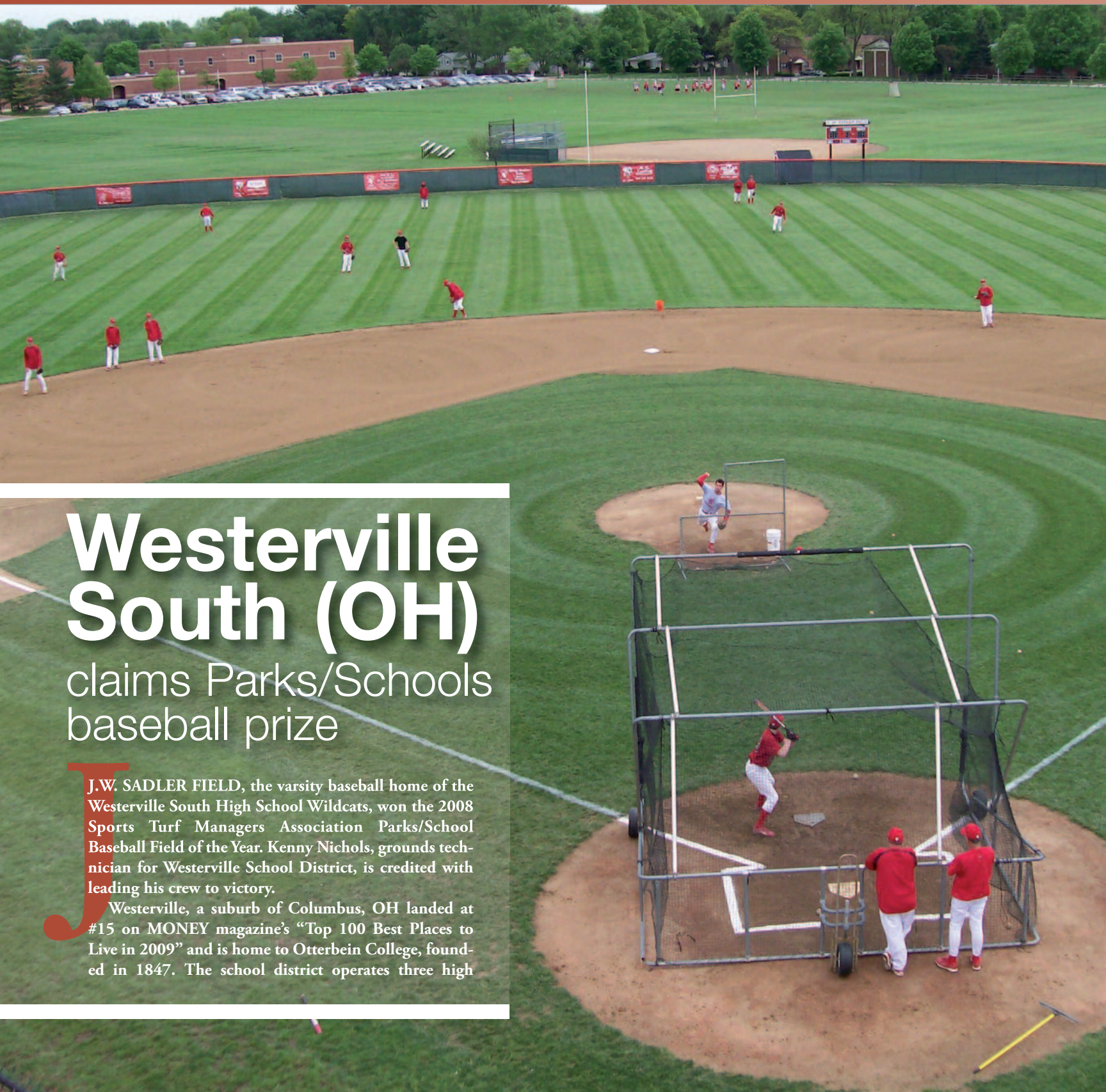


FIELD OF THE YEAR

Westerville South (OH) claims Parks/Schools baseball prize

J.W. SADLER FIELD, the varsity baseball home of the Westerville South High School Wildcats, won the 2008 Sports Turf Managers Association Parks/School Baseball Field of the Year. Kenny Nichols, grounds technician for Westerville School District, is credited with leading his crew to victory.

Westerville, a suburb of Columbus, OH landed at #15 on MONEY magazine's "Top 100 Best Places to Live in 2009" and is home to Otterbein College, founded in 1847. The school district operates three high





schools, the oldest of which is South, opened in 1960, four middle schools, and 16 elementary schools.

Originally built in the 1970's, Sadler Field sees nearly 400 hours of play a year and consists of native clay soil, with an infield mix of 34% sand, 34% silt, and 32% clay, with about 5% calcined clay mixed in. Nichols also uses KB Clay infield mix that is 70% sand, 5% silt, 25% clay.

Regarding special challenges, Nichols wrote in his award entry: "While we face many of the same challenges as other high school baseball facilities, such as unpredictable weather, overuse, unplanned events, vandalism, etc., the highest hurdle we have to overcome is a lack of funding for field maintenance.

"While baseball is a popular sport and is supported in our community, it simply does not draw the fans nor enjoy the popularity that sports like football and basketball do. Since it does not bring in the funds from ticket and concession sales, a natural consequence is it does not get the same level of support or funding when it comes time for budgets to be put together.

"This funding problem is compounded by the fact that the playing surfaces of baseball fields, by their nature, require more extensive and meticulous care than those of most other high school sports.

"So we are left with a dilemma; the need to provide and maintain a safe and playable field with limited resources to do so. Of course, there is also the desire to provide an attractive field that encourages the players and leaves them with an increased sense of self-worth and value by playing there.

"Our solution to clearing this funding hurdle and meeting our goals has been to work consistently to develop a spirit of teamwork, cooperation and communication within the entire organization. We realized several years ago that the one resource we had a lot of was people. From volunteers, parents, players, coaches,



OVERSEEDING PROGRAM

Late May: 2-3 lbs. 1000 sq. ft. on infield and aprons; rake-tined/aerated.

Mid August: 2-3 lbs. 1000 sq. ft. on infield and aprons; rake-tined.

Late November: 3 lbs. 1000 sq. ft. on all turf areas; rake-tined/aerated.

Monthly in season: 3-5 lbs. 1000 sq. ft. on basepaths; cleated in.

Seed specifications: Urban Ecstasy "C" mix by Southwest Landmark that includes 29.7% Bladerunner tall fescue, 24.78% Raptor tall fescue, 24.76% Crossfire II tall fescue, 14.82% Cruiser perennial ryegrass, and 4.96% Brooklawn Kentucky bluegrass.

grounds and custodial staffs to the athletic director and fans, we set out on a course to get each of these groups working together to make J. W. Sadler Field one that players and fans alike would remember. Each group has played a pivotal part in making this field a success and one that stands out from the rest.

"Coupled with an attitude of continuous improvement and ongoing development, we plan to continue to make this baseball field all that it can be and to bring out the best in the players who use it."

SportsTurf: How has the recession affected your operations?

Nichols: With the passage of an operating levy in May 2006, our school board made a commitment to the Westerville

community to maintain a balanced budget with those funds through June 30, 2010. Increased costs for goods and services coupled with decreases in state funding have made it necessary for all of our departments to make concessions in their budgets and staffing levels in order to maintain that commitment.

Although we are challenged to be increasingly more creative and efficient in our operations as we find ways to do more with less, ultimately, we are becoming better and stronger for it.

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

Nichols: Constant improvement is a way of life for us; a habit we have developed and encouraged through years of

FIELD OF THE YEAR



FIELD MAINTENANCE EQUIPMENT

- Ford compact tractor
- John Deere garden tractor/mower
- Deere compact tractor/loader (borrowed)
- Two Deere Z-mowers
- Gator utility vehicle
- Bas
- Basic mini motor grader (borrowed)
- EZ-Go golf cart
- Bluebird sod cutter (borrowed)
- WCS tine groomer
- Keystone mat drags
- Echo string trimmer
- Echo power broom
- Deere handheld blower
- Cub Cadet tank sprayer/spreader
- Toro 686 aerator
- Ohio Steel tow roller
- Pioneer Athletic paint striper
- Spectra LL 200 laser (borrowed)
- Chalker
- Plumb fiberglass tape measures
- Craftsman wheelbarrow
- Line-Mate lining tools
- WCS mound tamp and other hand tools



FERTILITY PROGRAM

March: annual soil test

Mid May: 14-28-10, .75-lb. N/1000 sq. ft.

Mid June: 25-2-5, .75-lb. N/1000 sq. ft.

Late August: 14-28-10, .75-lb. N/1000 sq. ft.

Late November: 46-0-0, 1.5-lb. N/1000 sq. ft.

Fertilizer specifications: Groland by Southwest Landmark that includes 14-28-10, 50% XCU; 25-2-5, 40% Uflexx with 33% Milorganite; and 46-0-0, 100% QR

practice. So it goes without saying that we will try several new things and make many adjustments this year to improve our operations and service levels.

Currently we are assessing areas that can be revamped to eliminate manual labor. For instance, at J.W. Sadler Field we are rounding the rear corners of the skinned area behind first and third—the ones where the groomer doesn't reach. We are planting grass there to eliminate the need for raking by hand and to allow both grooming and mowing to be completed with a machine.

We are also looking at ways to reduce the labor intensive practice of string trimming. We expect to achieve this by such things as: reducing, eliminating or modifying corners and other areas where mowers won't fit, using growth regulators and adding impervious surfaces.

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

Nichols: It comes from a quote by baseball great Harmon Killebrew, who said, "My father used to play with my brother and me in the yard. Mother would come out and say, 'You're tearing up the grass.' 'We're not raising grass,' Dad would reply. 'We're raising boys.' "

In other words, as important as it is for us to raise good, healthy turf and create safe and attractive fields to play on; at the end of the day, what really matters are the children we are raising and developing to be the world of tomorrow. After all, people matter most and developing people is our business. Dirt and turf are simply components in the quest for this higher purpose.

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

Nichols: That's a tough one since I, like many others, love the work I do and easily lean toward being out of balance on the work side. Some ideas that I find helpful in my struggle to achieve this balance are:

Know your priorities—mine are: God, my wife, my children, family and others. Work is something I should do because of and for these. It is not an end in itself.

Be aware of the need to be balanced. I have to know there is a need to fill it.

Be accountable for that balance to others. Give them permission to keep me in check.

Practice getting in and staying in balance. Like baseball or any other sport, we get good at what we practice. Good or bad. Practice good.

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

Nichols: Westerville City Schools should still be here providing the best possible education to the next generation. For me, I'll probably still be working dirt and developing people. Growing up, one of the things I wanted to be was a farmer, tilling the soil and growing crops. Though not in the way I dreamed of, that is actually what I get to do in some of my work here. Long term, I would like to work at the university level and/or in the area of sports field construction. ■

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.