

# Update on chemical products for sports turf

## Park district improves year round playability

Editor's note: This article was provided by The Tierney Agency of Philadelphia.

>> JIM KEPPLER, senior maintenance supervisor-grounds at the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District.

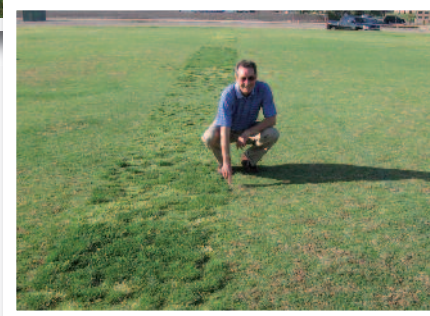


>> The combination of various grasses and weeds created a clumpy, uneven playing surface.



>> Left: BEFORE APPLICATIONS of herbicides, the playability of the fields was very poor.

>> Below: TO AVOID PIGMENT on uniforms, no dye was added to the tank mix. Chris Olsen, field development representative for Bayer Environmental Science, points out the zebra-stripe effect where applications were missed during spraying.



ANYONE WHO'S PLAYED SOCCER appreciates turf that allows the ball a true roll. A good pitch provides consistent, predictable speed with no unexpected changes in direction of a rolling ball.

When Jim Keppler in Simi Valley, CA inherited two soccer fields from the local American Youth Soccer Organization in 2007, the playability of the turf was poor. "There was a lot of *Poa annua*, fescues, ryegrass and clover," says Keppler, the senior maintenance supervisor-grounds at the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. The combination of various grasses and weeds created a clumpy, uneven playing surface. Soccer balls rolled every which way but true.

The soccer fields overseen by Keppler see quite a bit of action. Located 40 miles northwest of Los Angeles, the Simi Valley

area enjoys a warm, pleasant climate almost all year. The soccer association books games and practices year round. On average, each field sees anywhere from 48 soccer games per month.

In Keppler's mind, these newly inherited, heavily-used fields weren't fit for play. And after more than 30 years with the organization, he had earned the trust of district officials to make maintenance decisions as he saw fit.

"My experiment was to take out everything but the bermudagrass. All I wanted was nice, short-cut turf."

Soccer is the only game at Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. And it isn't the only responsibility for Keppler. With help from his 11-person staff, he manages 17 parks, five soccer fields, 14 ballfields and 54 miles of hiking trails.

The district is also home to two golf courses, an Olympic size swimming pool complex, tennis courts, basketball courts, and a community center.

Overall, the park district has a total of 50 parks and more than 5,600 acres of open space used for hiking, biking, horseback riding and wildlife preservation. "Our goal is to keep the public happy and our parks clean, green and safe," he says. "When you have a lot of use in the parks, it's a challenge." The park system makes Simi Valley a desirable place to live and more than 130,000 residents call it home. It's been home to Keppler his whole life.

Keppler's experiment started with a consultation from Joe Alexander, his distributor sales representative from Crop Production Services (formerly Western Farm Service). "Joe knew what products





➤ **KEPPLER**, seen here with application technician Paul Shugrue, relies on a staff of 11 to manage 17 parks, five soccer fields, 14 ball fields and 54 miles of hiking trails.



➤ **Above: THREE MONTHS** after the initial treatments, the fields are rolling smooth and fast.

Our gray leaf spot program begins in mid-July through September. **We rotate a number of products** through the season to prevent against fungicide resistance.

would help me get a pure stand of bermudagrass,” recalled Keppler. The two agreed on a weed control program built around Ronstar and Revolver herbicides (Bayer Environmental Science).

An application of Ronstar plus fertilizer was applied the first week in March 2008. By putting down the preemergent herbicide with fertilizer, Keppler could get in front of the germination of unwanted annual grasses and broadleaf weeds while also helping the turf to green up. He used a Ronstar formulation from The Andersons with a 15-5-10 nutrient mix.

A week later he followed with a tank mix application of post-emergent Revolver

and methylated seed oil surfactant. The sulfonylurea product selectively removes cool-season grasses from warm-season grasses. Keppler applied a broadcast, foliar spray of Revolver at the rate of 16 oz. per acre.

### Zebra stripes

The crew used a 16-foot wide spray rig to make the application of Revolver. Typically, Keppler would use a dye indicator in the tank mix to track the spray pattern. But due to the year round use of the fields, he didn’t use one because teams were still playing. “We didn’t want white uniforms turning green from the dye,” he says.

Without the dye, the crew

couldn’t be exactly sure where they had sprayed. The result was an unexpected side-by-side comparison about 2 months later showing how well the product worked. “It looked like zebra stripes. There was a stand of perennial in 2-foot wide lines across sections of the fields where we missed with the rig.” Keppler came back in with Revolver to spot spray on the areas missed and, within a week, the stripes were gone.

All that was left was bermudagrass. According to Keppler, “not only does the turf look great, the density is much tighter than it had been.”

It can take about 2 years to turn a sports field from clumpy and uneven to nearly 100 percent bermudagrass.

“Last year, when we started the applications of Revolver and Ronstar, we had about 80 percent *Poa*, clover and other perennial grasses. The base of bermuda was there, but choked out,” says Keppler. “When we went to make the first application this year, we had about 10 percent *Poa* and perennials. That is a 70 percent reduction.” ■