

# Getting ahead: education, experience both count a lot

**C**ontinuing education has become an essential part of the sports turf industry. As more attention is focused on the safety and playability of athletic fields and job competition increases, it is important that sports turf managers continue to develop professionally to meet their own goals and the standard required at their facility.

Continuing education benefits both the sports turf manager and their employer. Sports turf managers can move up the ladder in the workplace, receive promotions (and salary increases), and become a more valuable employee. In turn, the employer has a highly skilled worker/workforce that can perform a variety of tasks and possesses various skills.

The sports turf industry is constantly evolving

with new research, methodology, field science, and products. Therefore, it is more important than ever for sports turf managers to be at the forefront and take advantage of continuing education opportunities.

*Editor's note: Kristen interviewed three veteran STMA members on what qualities they look for when hiring turf managers. Here are the responses:*



## Jess Evans, Episcopal HS, Alexandria, VA

I feel the value of both education and industry experience as equal measures on the scale, both eventually will add up to a competent, well versed and valued employee. In the past I have hired experienced sports field managers and skilled laborers who can jump right in with very little training which of course is good, as well as recent college graduates with all the current knowledge that comes with our very specific and detailed sports field industry, specifically turfgrass management and how important soil composition is to growing quality sports turf.

The experienced guy was able to draw on the work he had done in the past, offering suggestions and ideas on things that worked for him, while the college grad, not having the hands-on experience offered additional ideas related to the specifics of soils, drainage, design and the always evolving sport grass trials.



My ideal candidate has have the following, in this order: 1) passion, he or she has to love what they do; 2) commitment, they have committed to the work, the finished product and our industry; 3) personality, I need to see excitement in their work ethic which means they need to constantly bring something to the table, ideas and suggestions to make work better, more productive, more pro-active; and 4) perseverance, they have to work hard, give me 110% everyday. That's all any superintendent can ask for.

## My ideal candidate possesses the ability to be a part of a team, share with the team as well as learn from the team.

If I have done my homework there should be no issues with new employees' positive attitude and work productivity. Right now I'm thankfully batting 100%.

The only other criteria I can think of is honesty and dedication; collectively these attributes give me one heck of a sports field manager which I think all of us in the industry would be proud to have on our team.

### **Abby McNeal, CSFM, Wake Forest University**

It is hard to place a value on either education or experience when they both add to the person. I have personally liked a balanced individual who has some education and experience. It allows them to understand turf science basics, answers the whys of certain maintenance tasks and then their experience only helps them put their knowledge to work and expand them professionally.

Having some of both just provides more than just hands-on experience and leaning. A person can take book knowledge and learn how to practically use it as a base to start from and then grow into where their knowledge is used for each situation.

What skills and personality qualities does the ideal candidate possess?

My ideal candidate possesses the ability to be a part of a team, share with the team as well as learn from the team. Create a plan as a group and learn from all situations as to how to be better the next time. Flexibility in our

industry is critical because things are always changing, just like the weather, so you have to be able to adapt and overcome in any situation.

Thinking outside their "turf box" is also important. Too often our turf vision becomes cluttered and we need to "re-look" and that is an important feature or we may miss something that the turf is telling us.

You have to take a chance on a candidate and set goals for them and evaluate in 3-6 month intervals during their first year. If you

as a supervisor do not take some ownership in helping them become the employee that you are looking for then you haven't done your job. You need to provide them with opportunities during this evaluation time period that allows you to see what their true potential is and that will help them become a better turf manager. Just like we strive for value they need to know that they are valued as part of the group.

I always ask them to tell me what they like least about the job, what excites them about the job. This allows me to understand where their strengths and weakness are and how I can best fit them into the maintenance program. This also tells me more than what's on their resume or application. Ross Kurcab, my boss with the Broncos, always said, "Happy cows make better milk" and this is true but you need to know what makes an employee happy so that they will give you more effort when it's needed. Everyone is an individual and you need to remember that so you can try to provide a fun and exciting work environment, its helps a lot during the long days when there is too much to get done.

### **Jerad Minnick, Maryland Soccer Foundation**

The value of education versus experience is the most challenging piece to differentiate between candidates when hiring. There is really no correct answer. Education is extremely important to me, as a lead assistant

needs the turfgrass background and tools to understand the science behind my management plans. But I have had great success with non-science educated managers too, as I have been able to teach and facilitate them learning the science that I use daily.

Experience is just as vital, even if not more though. If a candidate has limited experience operating mowers, tractors, aerators, spraying equipment, etc., then they are not prepared to be an assistant. They need to spend another season or two as a crew member or intern to gain the experience they need to better manage crews and fields.

My ideal candidate will always possess the hunger and desire to learn more each and every day. We work with science and people, and both science and dealing with people is always evolving. So, they will not be successful without an open mind. Also, I look for someone that has a passion for the work they do. Managing high-level fields isn't a job it's a way of life. So the people who catch my attention are ones that truly enjoy sports turf management and enjoy working with people.

I have had no trouble at all recognizing if a candidate will be productive and positive. Productive, "get it done" type of people are always positive. Positive people exude friendliness and generally smile a lot, even when they are nervous in an interview. They make statements from a "glass half full" view of life, using words like "can" and "will", and never use the "can't". They give the positive experiences of their past employments and spend little to no time on the negative aspects.

Generally the positive and productive gauge will separate a majority of candidates for a position. I personally am appreciative of a person who has goals and aspirations of being more than an assistant, as their drive toward those goals will make them much more productive. Yet there is a "happy medium," because the right person will be humble and understand that their learning and maturation process should be based in always having an open mind and respecting all of their peers and managers, whether they agree with the decisions being made or not. ■

*Kristen Althouse is education manager for the Sports Turf Managers Association. She can be reached at [kalthouse@stma.org](mailto:kalthouse@stma.org).*

# Tips on the lip:

## maintaining a safe infield-to-outfield transition area

How many fields with infields/skinned areas/lips do you maintain?

In season, about how many hours a week are spent maintaining the infield lip(s)?

Who actually does this task at your organization?

What is your most indispensable tool for maintaining good lip areas?

What's your #1 tip for anyone seeking to improve their infield lips this season?

**MARK FREVER, CSFM, Albion College, Albion, MI**

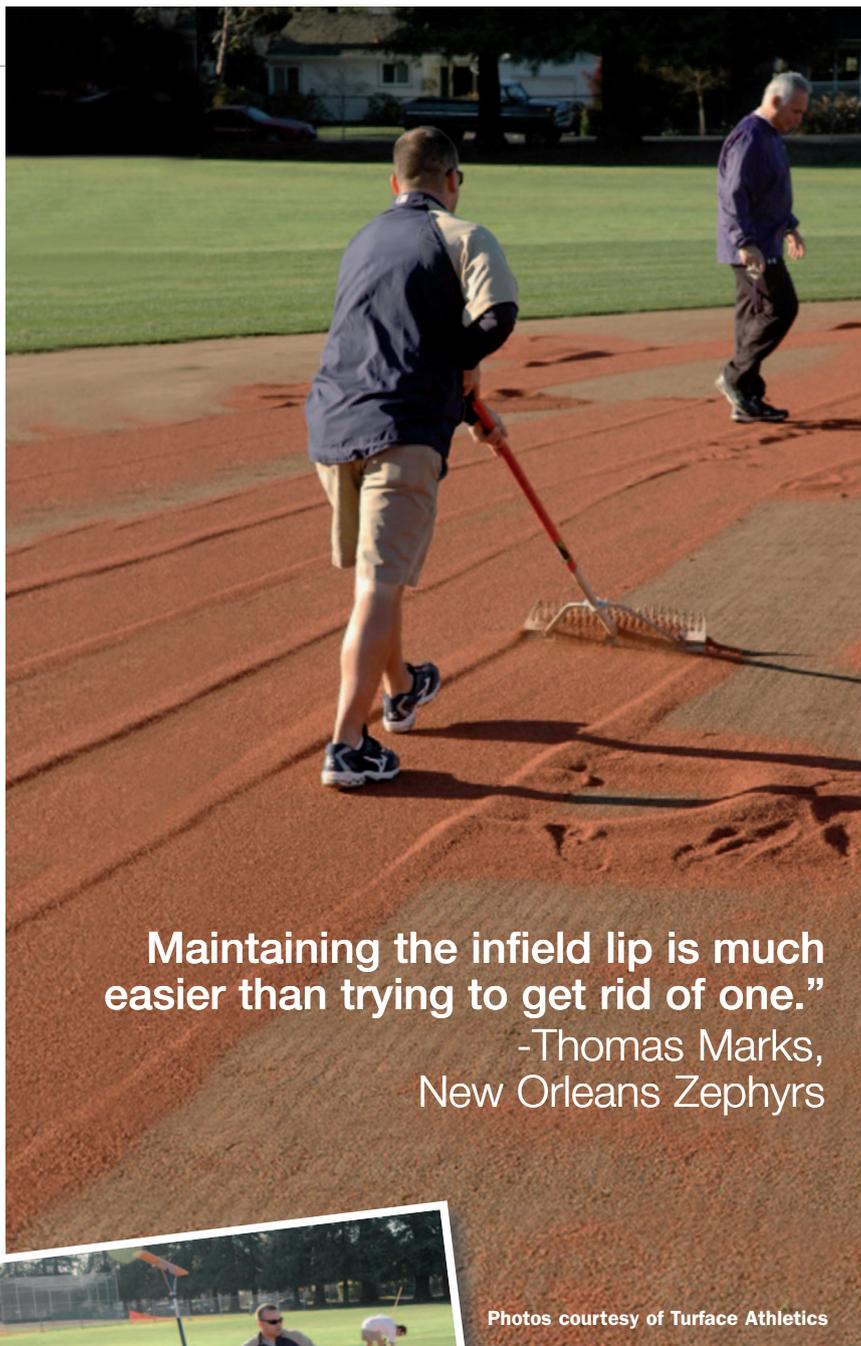
1. Two fields, baseball and softball.
2. 2 hours.
3. Baseball team cares for baseball lips, softball team does not. Grounds staff cares for softball. Softball coach position has been a revolving door and maintenance is not emphasized in the softball culture.
4. Long, orange bristle broom.
5. Work with the coach and players, so team takes ownership of lips.

**MARTIN KAUFMAN, CSFM, Ensworth Schools, Nashville, TN**

1. Three fields
2. 5 hours for infield, 1 hour for lip.
3. Grounds staff.
4. Huley hoe.
5. Weekly maintenance/attention.

**JOSH KLUTE, Haymarket Park, Lincoln, NE**

1. One baseball and softball infield along with warning track edges/lips.
2. 15-20+ hours per field, but actually any maintenance practice we do somehow ends up having an influence on our lips.



Maintaining the infield lip is much easier than trying to get rid of one.”  
-Thomas Marks,  
New Orleans Zephyrs



Photos courtesy of Turface Athletics

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3. During the season my two assistants, two interns and myself spend a lot of time on the edges of the infield. After games everyone on game day staff is trained to maintain the edges if need be.

4. Field type push brooms, to remove any conditioner/infield material out of every edge after games or practices.

5. Spend the extra time each day after practice or game and get any excess conditioner and infield material out of your grass edges. It could be with anything like a rake, broom, blower, a water hose or even your hand if you don't have anything else. It's a little extra work each day but in the long run it will save time and prevent unwanted lips over time.

#### **RON HOSTICK, CSFM, San Diego State**

1. Three.
2. 30 minutes per practice/game.
3. Both players and grounds staff.
4. A good hose end nozzle for occasional lip cleaning.
5. Don't drag too fast anywhere on the field and don't drag closer than 12 inches from the lip.

#### **THOMAS MARKS, New Orleans Zephyrs**

1. One infield for a professional baseball team.
2. During the season, I spend approximately 30 minutes or 3-4 hours per week on the infield lip.
3. I do the work.
4. The two best tools for controlling the infield lip are a backpack blower and hose. After every game, we use a backpack blower at low rpm to blow any infield materials back into the dirt from the grass. The wetter the conditions, the more aggressive we have to be with the blower. Then once a month, I use the infield hose at full stream to blow dirt from the edges back into the infield.
5. Maintaining the infield lip is much easier than trying to get rid of one.

#### **ANDREW GOSSEL, Covenant Christian HS, Indianapolis, IN**

1. We have one diamond on campus.
2. We spend about 1.5 hours/week in season on our edges. The field gets edged about every 2-3 weeks depending on weather and game schedule.
3. I am the one that does all of the edging. We will also have ballplayers rake topdressing out of all of the edges after each home game, and depending on the game schedule, we may also have them do it after some practices (if we have a longer layoff in between home games; in all, they are probably raked at least 3-4 times/week). I will also wash the edges out with a high-pressure nozzle 2-3 times/year.
4. The most indispensable tool for edges is probably the leaf rakes we use to limit the amount of topdressing and infield mix that gets in the edges and creates lips. We obviously need a good edger to keep the edges neat and trim, but even if they are edged neatly, there can still be a build-up of material in the edge that

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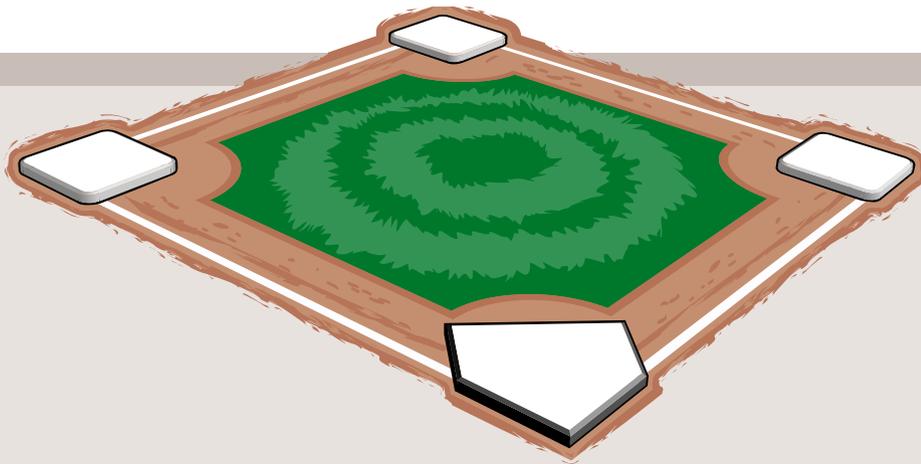
5. My #1 tip to improve the lips would be to get them in proper shape in the off-season, and then work at them routinely to keep them in good shape. It's a lot easier to rake them out and edge regularly than to do it once a year.

## **KENNY NICHOLS, Westerville City Schools, Westerville, OH**

1. We have 26 baseball and softball fields in our school district, 11 at high schools, five at middle schools, and the other ten are at elementary schools and are used for gym classes and by local Little Leagues.

2. On our high school fields, approximately 2.5 hours are spent on each field during each week that the field is in play. The time varies on middle school and elementary fields due to the amount of use, type of play and user groups involved.

3. Coaches, players, athletic directors, volunteers and contractors.



## SKINNY ON SKINS

**A**t last month's STMA Conference, Paul Zwaska of Beacon Athletic, the former Baltimore Orioles head groundskeeper, gave a presentation entitled, "The Skinny on Skins." Here are some of the most relevant points he made. *Editor's note: Zwaska made it clear his talk did not include taking "stabilizing" amendments into account but rather Mother Nature alone:*

While some folks refer to taking care of infield skins as an "art," Zwaska said soils are all about science. "A good infield skin is the result of applying principles of soil science," he said. There are two components of skins: the base soil, which should be 3-6 inches deep, is usually imported to the site, crowned to facilitate surface drainage, and is firmly compacted. The

Of four options for providing drainage for your base soil, Zwaska said there is only one way to go: grading the surface 1/2 to 1%.

## We consider our most essential tool to be knowledge

4. We consider our most essential tool to be knowledge—knowing what to do and how to do it. Tools that we use to keep lips from building up include landscape, leaf and tine rakes, stiff bristle brooms, and to remove lips that have formed we use a sod cutter.

5. Learn and practice good field grooming techniques to keep infield mix out of the grass. If it does get in, get it out as soon as possible. Preventive maintenance along the way can definitely save much time correcting lip problems after they form, but more importantly, it helps provide consistently safe playing fields for the athletes that use them. ■

other is the topdressing, which should be 1/4 to 1/2-inch thick to act like mulch and control moisture. Anything over an inch Zwaska described as a "beach."

Zwaska said good infield skins have:

- Traction
- Playability (ball bounce affected by too loose or too tight skin)
- Resiliency
- Drainage (you want water to run over the skin rather than percolate through it)
- Contrast or color (darker is better for both players and fans)
- Consistency (not day to day but rather from location to location on same infield—the toughest to achieve)

Infield skins are composed of (or should be) sand, silt and clay; your ideal percent of sand depends on your specific situation. Sand provides the skin's structural integrity, like a human skeleton Zwaska said, and should be between 58-75% of your overall mix. Of this, he said, 40-50% should be retained on medium sieve.

Silt has particle sizes between sand and clay, and acts as a bridge between those

two elements; 10-35% of your mix should contain silt, but Zwaska emphasized that the ratio of silt to clay is the main concern rather than the percent of silt alone.

Clay provides the color and moisture retention of your skin; 15-35% of mix has been the accepted range but again, it's the ratio of silt to clay that should concern turf managers, he said.

The big question is, How do I get the right mix for my field? Zwaska said there is no industry standard and most managers rely on trial and error, while being limited to mixes that are harvested regionally. "There is underuse of infield soil testing," he said. "You can fix what you have unless you know what's already in it."

To get a good sample, Zwaska said you must remove topdressing, and then go down 2 or 3 inches deep into your skin in 8-12 locations from the infield to take samples. Throw all these in box and mix

them around, pulverize them, for one good sample. You then fill a quart-sized, zip-locked plastic bag to be tested.

The answers to two questions dictate what mix your field needs: 1) What are your facility's maintenance resources and practices, and 2) Do you have access to water? After soil test results are in, managers need to classify their fields: do you have water, and is your maintenance "regular," "limited," or "volunteer"? Define the issues through analysis and then solve those issues by implementing a strategy, Zwaska said.

Your soil test's particle analysis will tell you precisely the composition of your infield so you don't have to guess, and tell you the strengths and weaknesses of your existing base soil; Zwaska said to make sure that analysis contains a sand particle distribution test, and then look for the values that really matter—percentages of sand, silt and clay.

First, find you ideal sand content. Here are target numbers from your test: for professional fields, 58-62% sand, 38-45% medium sieve sand, and a 0.5 to 1.0 silt/clay ratio. For intermediate fields, you want 65-69% sand, 45-50% medium sieve sand, and a 0.5 to 1.0 silt/clay ratio. For recreational fields, 70-75% sand, more than 50% medium sieve sand, and a 0.5 to 1.0 ratio is desirable, Zwaska said. Does your sand content match your field type, e.g., professional, intermediate or recreational?

You find the silt/clay ratio by dividing silt content by clay content numbers; 3.0 is too high, for example. Too much or too little silt creates binding problems for your skin, said Zwaska. He said a high sand content and low silt/clay ratio leads to a too-loose skin that chunks out; that means you must increase the silt and clay content with a mix greater than 75%. Low sand content and high silt/clay ratio leads

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to dusty, mucky and greasy surfaces; and low sand with high silt/clay ratio makes for "feathery" dirt. With low sand content your goal is to neutralize the excess silt content. Increase medium sand content and silt/clay content to lower the ratio.

### Solving the problem

Once you know your base soil's composition, you can fix the problem, said Zwaska. A typical mix is 40% sand overall (60-75% retained on medium sieve) and 60% silt and clay combined. Your options include removing and replacing your dirt with a balanced mix and that is expensive; otherwise you will need to amend your existing soil. A lower sand content is the goal and you must align that with your facility's resources.

Mixes that work best are specific blends that can be replicated by using engineered soil technology use comput-

ers to custom blend amendments and mixes based on your needs. Zwaska said to ask for test results for brands that specify their soil composition.

### Drainage

Of four options for providing drainage for your base soil, Zwaska said there is only one way to go: grading the surface ½ to 1%. A layer of sand below the skin's base soil means you are hoping it drains vertically, same with drain tile and sand layer, and those options, along with cutting in a trench drain, are not recommended.

When it comes to choosing your topdressing material, Zwaska said you need to learn the attributes of the various choices for this layer: calcined clay, vitrified clay, crushed aggregate, or diatomaceous earth. Do you need more moisture? Less moisture?

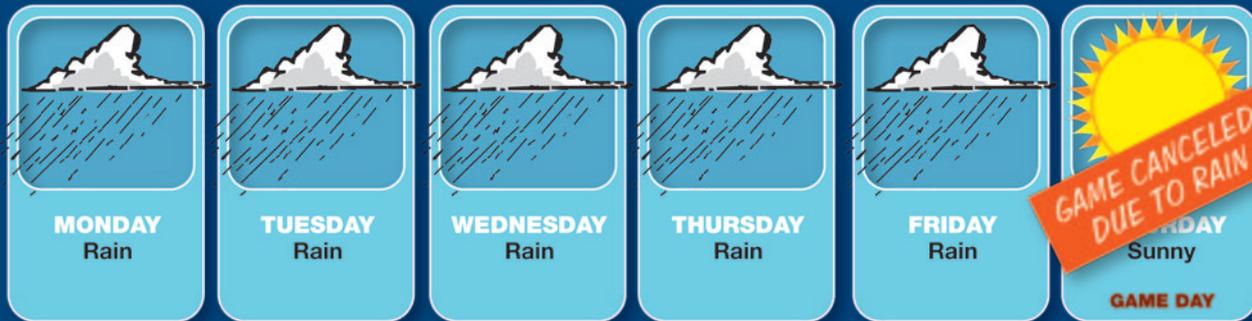
### Topdressing advice

Zwaska stressed the benefits of topdressing, including:

- Slows evaporative process from base soil.
- Provides buffer zone between player's cleats and the base soil/
- Improves infield's resiliency and sliding surface.
- Improves playability in damp or wet conditions.
- Simplifies skin maintenance with less nail-dragging and more float dragging.
- Protects integrity of base soil.

Zwaska added that it's important not to nail-drag more than ¼ to ½ inch deep into the topdressing nor too often so as not to affect traction and playability. He said that topdressing is good for even a hard surface regardless of whether irrigation is available.-Eric Schroder ■

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# PREPARING BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL FIELDS

*Editor's note: This material was provided by Turface Athletics.*

**S**pring maintenance on any playing field is a crucial step to ensuring a safe and fun season. To assist groundskeepers and field maintenance workers, here are some maintenance tips to assist with both baseball and softball infield preparation and outfield turf care.

Before starting any maintenance, walk the entire field and evaluate winter damage, vandalism and areas that require special attention. Putting together an action plan to address specific infield and turf needs is the next step.

“Get started as early as weather permits, and be sure to refer back to any plans you were unable to complete the prior year,” said Jeff Langner, brand manager for Turface Athletics. “If you find you need assistance with soil testing, developing a maintenance plan or selecting appropriate products, your local field supply distributor may be a great resource.”

Turf care can be organized by two categories: soil analysis and care, and establishing and maintaining vegetative growth. Soil analysis testing will help you determine pH level adjustments, the need for a fertility program, and the need for pre-emergent herbicides to help prevent weeds. Aerating the field when the temperature is cool will help relieve compaction and improve drainage. Topdressing the field helps modify the soil structure and levels the field which contributes to stronger grass plants.

To establish healthy grass growth, first you'll need to check the irrigation system and quick connects for leaks and damaged heads. Ideally, you'll need to establish a mowing routine that keeps the grass at a manageable and playable height, while never removing more than one third of the leaf. Making sure the mower blades or reels are sharpened is also an important step.

Preparing your infield or clay infield surface not only keeps the field in better condition, it helps prevent lips in skinned and grass transition areas that can lead to serious injury. First, you'll want to remove any grass or weeds on skinned areas by mechanical means or spraying with a turf labeled, non-selective herbicide.

Next, aggressively spike drag or scarify the skinned infield to integrate infield mix that may have segregated over the winter months. Removing any lips in skinned-to-grass transition areas is not only safer, it helps promote drainage and prevents puddling. You'll also need to regrade or add infield mix to fix holes and level the infield area. Mat drag to

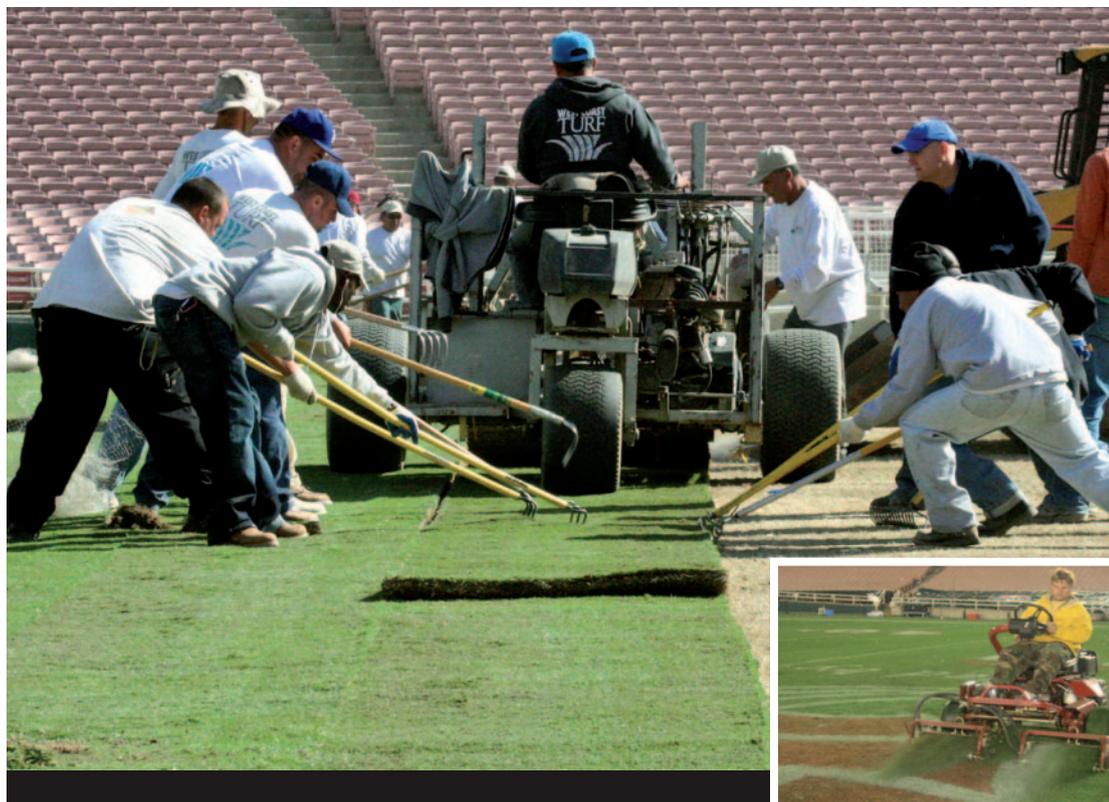
smooth the infield and edge the transition areas between skinned areas and turf.

Finally, you'll need to check the conditions of the bases, pitchers mound, batters boxes, bullpen and catchers area for holes and wear. You may want to consider installing specialized professional mound clay or clay blocks to these areas.

## Top Tips for Infield Care

- ⊙ Avoid folding mound and plate tarps; instead, roll the tarp on a tube or PVC pipe and hang for easy storage.
- ⊙ Rake baselines lengthwise from home toward first and third.
- ⊙ Make a single pass to “groove” a wet infield mix to create ridges, increasing surface area to speed drying time.
- ⊙ Hand rake the 12-inch strip along the turf area after you have dragged the rest of the infield.
- ⊙ Vary your raking start and stop locations as well as drag pattern.
- ⊙ Use a soil conditioner or a specific drying agent that doesn't break down.
- ⊙ To fill in holes in batters boxes or mounds with water and a tamp, sweep hole clean of loose material, moisten hole, add packing clay, and tamp.
- ⊙ To remove standing water puddles on infields use a cup, sponge or pump, or a drying agent to absorb the remaining water.
- ⊙ Remove the plugging bases before dragging an infield; rake or drag material from under the base and fill in the sliding pits. Roll or tamp pits.
- ⊙ To line outfield grass use paint for lines in turf and consider painting lines on skinned area.
- ⊙ Never leave the field “loose” from scarifying or tilling if heavy rains are expected and the field is to be used soon. ■





Will Schnell scalps Rose Bowl field under the lights.

## Field takes center stage at the Rose Bowl

*Editor's note: This article was written by Danielle Marman, director of marketing for West Coast Turf*

**A**s Ohio State and Oregon battled it out at the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day, a carefully planned, different Rose Bowl challenge was just beginning about 125 miles away in the California desert. The test? The Rose Bowl needed a fresh new field installed to host the BCS Citi National Championship game—and it had to be ready in just 6 days.

In 2007, a separate BCS National Championship game was added to the BCS system. University of Phoenix Stadium was the first venue to host the new game schedule, with the Fiesta Bowl played January 2, and the BCS National Championship 6 days later at the same location.

This presented a question. How exactly do you get a field perfect enough to accommodate the

most important game in college football less than one week after the wear and tear of another major college bowl game? Arizona Diamondbacks' head groundskeeper Grant Trenbeath was called in to consult. "We didn't have much time to get the field ready or rooted, so we opted to use an 'overlay' technique that I'd used before at Chase Field for the Insight Bowl. With the overlay, you use thick-cut sod and put it right on top of the field that is in there. The sod is so heavy that it stays in place and doesn't move," Trenbeath said.

It worked. The first "stand alone" BCS National Championship game was played on a flawless new field with only 6 days to prepare.

### Taking notes

Knowing their turn was coming, the Rose Bowl representatives (including head groundskeeper Will

Schnell) were watching. "Will and I had some conversations," Trenbeath said. "He wanted to make sure he was making the right choice, so he investigated all of the details. You don't want any surprises, especially for a game of this magnitude. He wanted to know exactly what to expect and how to prepare. He did all of the homework."

The Rose Bowl had alternatives, but Schnell was confident that the overlay technique was the right option, and he didn't

have to work very hard to convince others.

The decision was made. "Will is an artist when it comes to our field," said Rose Bowl general manager Darryl Dunn. "We have the utmost confidence in his knowledge and opinion when it comes to the field. I wanted

to be sure that this was the right thing to do to provide the best possible 'stage' for the biggest event of the year. I did ask him quite a few questions, and he provided the right answers. Will, Kevin Ash (chief administration officer of the Tournament of Roses), and I discussed this plan for more than a year and we went with it. I didn't lose any sleep, as I believe you can't trust your people just half the time; I trust Will Schnell."

The Rose Bowl used their regular sod supplier, Palm Desert, CA-based West Coast Turf. "They specialize in big roll athletic turf sod," Schnell said. "They provide a great product."

It also helped that West Coast Turf has had extensive experience in this particular

technique, as they were the growers and installers of sod for all of Trenbeath's projects in Arizona as well as "overlay fields" for Super Bowl XXXVIII at Reliant Stadium, and several other venues. Schnell worked closely with the sod supplier to prepare his strategy. He made regular visits out to the farm, and specified his turf variety, soil medium, and fertilization schedule. He also monitored the progress of the turf by taking soil samples and doing tissue testing monthly.

Being a perfectionist, Schnell even went so far as to do a simulation of the field installation when a U2 concert this past October presented the model scenario. After the concert a new overlay field surface was put in for a UCLA game scheduled 9 days later. Schnell imposed a 6-day timeframe for which to complete the field.

"Putting in a new field then was out of necessity, but it also worked out to be a great opportunity," said Dunn. "It was a great trial run."

But he didn't stop there. Although Schnell researched the overlay at University of Phoenix Stadium, he had a very different situation. In Arizona they have a roof on the facility so they can control the weather. The Rose Bowl doesn't. Even though "it never rains in California" as the old song goes, they couldn't take any chances with drainage.

So in early summer some soil testing was done to see how the Rose Bowl field's drainage system was performing. After the report came back, it was determined that a new complete system was essential. The only time available in the busy Rose Bowl calendar was to start the project November 22 right after the last UCLA game. Two layers of sod had to be removed, a new drainage system, growing medium and sod needed to be installed, and it all had to be completed in 13 days.



Schnell called Dan Almond to help him map out this daunting mission, and assembled a team to pull it off. Just Moving Dirt was contracted to remove the two sod layers totaling 3 inches, and another 6 inches of the old soil medium. GreenOne Industries installed the new drain matrix (their QwikDrain system). West Coast Sand and Gravel provided the new 6-inch, straight sand growing medium that topped the new

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drain system. Bill Barkshire of Barkshire Laser Leveling was the final piece of the puzzle. He laser graded the growing medium in preparation for the sod to be laid December 4 and 5. Work was done around the clock to stay on schedule. This field had time to root, and hosted the Rose Bowl Game on January 1.



### Doing the right thing?

The Capital One Bowl, held at the Citrus Bowl in Orlando, was televised just before this year's Rose Bowl game. On a scale from 1-10, field conditions went from a "1" in Orlando, to a "12" in Pasadena.

The Citrus Bowl field had been newly sodded with traditional sod a few weeks earlier. It did not root. Add in another bowl game 3 days prior, cold weather, and a downpour, and it made for a muddy, sloppy and unstable field come game time.

Minutes after Ohio State celebrated their Rose Bowl game victory, ABC's Brent Musburger revealed on air that the Rose Bowl was going to be getting a new field with new sod that very night for the BCS Championship game. That announcement prompted public alarm. With the current field still looking pristine, no one could quite figure out why they would risk taking a "perfectly good" field out, and put a new one in for a game less than a week away, especially after just witnessing the poor results of the new sod job at the Citrus Bowl.

"My phone started ringing immediately," said West Coast Turf's project manager Tom Stafford. "People thought we were all crazy to replace the field. But what no one understood was that we've all been setting this up for over a year. They also didn't understand that we didn't expect the sod to root and that is why we were using thick-cut sod. We were 100% positive that it would work, and give the championship the ultimate surface for the game.

"Sure, the Rose Bowl field looked great on TV during the Oregon/Ohio State game, but it was also covered with gallons of

paint for logos, and had a lot of pregame, halftime, and postgame festivities on it in addition to the game," Stafford said. "Could they have gotten that field ready again in 6 days? Yes, I'm sure. But that isn't how the Rose Bowl does things. They're famous for that field. It is their brand. Nothing less than perfect is good enough there."

And, it's not all just about how the grass looks. "We wanted to provide a non-used surface, so there's not a cleat mark out there when the kickoff takes place," Schnell explained. "You see a player go out there and put his hand down on the grass and say, 'Is this real, or is it fake?' that's a tremendous compliment. The first thing we want to do is provide a great playing surface for the athletes. Then you want it to look good on camera."

There was also a "Plan B." Had rain been in the forecast, the crew was prepared to replace only the painted endzones with new sod. Luckily, rain wasn't part of the program.

Right after kickoff on New Year's Day, West Coast Turf crews began their own "kickoff" and started harvesting the overseeded hybrid bermuda in the desert. They continued through the night. Rolls were cut 1 1/2-feet thick, 30-foot long, and 42-inches wide. Fifty truckloads accommodated 110,000 square feet of sod. Trucks began arriving in Pasadena just a few hours after the final whistle was blown, and the last remnants of celebration were removed.

At the stadium, West Coast Turf supplied a crew of 24 installers, and the Rose Bowl added another 24, including some "Turf All-Stars." Schnell enlisted the help of Mets head groundskeeper Bill Deacon, Home Depot Center's Kyle Waters, Reno Aces' Eric Blanton, Neal Pate of the Browns, Justin Peliquin, and some of the Dodgers' ground crew. "Most importantly, I had my two assistants, Miguel Yopez and Martin Rodriguez, working hard the whole time, too. They deserve a lot of the credit," Schnell said.

Right after the game, crews scalped the field down to 1/4 inch and started unrolling the new sod right on top.

"It took 21 hours from the time we started putting in the sod and rolling the field, leveling it out to get the pool table effect, as low and level as possible," said Schnell. Workers installed through the night, finishing just before sundown the next day.

The ground crew spent the next 5 days painting new logos, watering the turf at just the right levels, rolling and sweeping the grass, and mowing at exactly the right time and length so the grass would hit its peak condition on game day.

### The final score

On January 7, the hard work paid off. The field looked bright green, seamless, lush, and pristine. Playing conditions could not have been better.

"When the field looks beautiful there's a sense of accomplishment amongst those on the inside," said Kevin Ash, chief administration officer of the Tournament of Roses. The millions of television viewers seemed to agree. Headlines read "Rose Bowl Goes Extra Yard," and some of the comments from the press were, "Field at the Rose Bowl is immaculate, not a blade of grass out of place; every BCS Championship should be held there," and "Rose Bowl field looks better than Augusta."

Before the game, Texas quarterback Colt McCoy was on the field and commented on air that he wished he had brought his pitching wedge.

But what did Schnell think? “Every time I do something I always look for ways to make it better. Even before the last play of the BCS, Tom Stafford and I were coming up with ways to make it better. There’s always room for improvement. Two days before the game we saw we were going to have a really good field. I told my staff, ‘OK guys, it is end of the 3rd quarter, and we’re up by 14. I want it to be 21 by game time.’ Too many times I have had projects that are going well, and then we back off. Boy, they turned it up a notch! By game time the grounds crew was up by 21 points. The Rose Bowl crew from top to bottom met the challenge head on, and had an incredible victory. Heck, it was a blow out! In my book, it ended up ‘Grounds Crew 30, Failure 3.’ The ‘3’ is for improvement next time,” Schnell said.

“People all over see a field that looks good. We know what it took to make that happen,” Ash said.

And now we all know what it took, too. Trust in talented people, quality product, precise planning, clever strategy, hard work, and of course, cooperating weather.

A few days after the game, grass from the endzones and logos was removed from the field and taken back to the sod farm. There it was



laid back down, cut into small rolls, hydro-cooled, and shipped to New Jersey. It was then cut into 3 x 3-inch pieces, freeze dried, packaged into UV glass cases, and sold as “collectable souvenirs” for \$100 to \$250. The remaining championship sod was recycled, and used for repair work in other locations. ■



But he’s a real winner, week-in and week-out. Just ask the Dallas Cowboys coaching staff, trainers and players. You see, Chris takes care of two of the Cowboys most precious possessions - their two outdoor TifSport Bermudagrass practice fields. As Chris says, “Even though this is

a very young turf, the coaches and players like it a lot! There’s better footing because of the healthy mat underneath, so it’s much easier on the players and their joints.” The TifSport growers are mighty proud that America’s Team is now practicing on America’s grass - TifSport.

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