Year One at Citi Field

CITI FIELD, the new stadium of the New York Mets in Flushing Meadows–Corona Park, Queens, saw a lot of disappointments last season but the playing surface was not among them. The $850 million replacement for Shea Stadium was funded by the sale of New York City municipal bonds which are to be repaid by the Mets plus interest.

The park opened March 29, 2009, with a college baseball game between St. John's Red Storm and the Georgetown Hoyas. The Mets played their first two games at the ballpark on April 3 and April 4 against the Boston Red Sox as charity exhibition games and the first regular season home game was played on April 13 against the San Diego; the Padres' Jody Gerut christened the park with a leadoff homerun.

We asked Bill Deacon, manager, field operations, for the Mets for his assessment of how the first year went for his turf.

SportsTurf: Overall, how did your turf play and wear in its first season?

Deacon: The turf performed very well, we had all the usual wear areas with the one difference between Citi Field and Shea is the amount of shade we have here. The turf behind homeplate where we have the most shade was weaker than I would have liked, by the time the sod was installed in November it was in the shade until late March and we did not have the root growth there that we had on the rest of the field.

ST: What if any unexpected problems/situations came up during the season? How did you handle them?

Deacon: The only problems we had this year were things we could not control, too much rain and covering the turf for 9-10 days for three concerts, the longest period of time I have covered a field for. With the amount of rain this year we had to cover the infield with the tarp much more often than I would have liked, but a positive of all this was that we did discovered that we could inflate our tarp while it was covering the infield using our SubAir unit. By doing this the tarp sat about 6-10 inches off the ground and allowed air movement underneath. As for the concerts we survived with minimal sodding, it seemed to be the only time all year that the weather cooperated with us.

ST: How closely did you follow the maintenance plan you had set up before the season? What changes are you considering making for 2010 season?

Deacon: What I do is set up a plan based on our team schedule and then alter it as our off days change. This year we had three breaks of 10 days or more that we planned to use for aerification, topdressing and sodding; we lost two of those to outside events so we ended up with just one long break all season to actually pull cores. We altered the plan by solid tinning and very light topdressing on 7-day breaks. The only major change we plan on making is pulling cores more often but again that will depend on the schedule of outside events.

ST: How did systems perform? Is there any technology that having a brand new stadium made possible that most guys don't have? If so, how did they do? Any other new equipment, etc., coming for 2010?

Deacon: The systems all performed well, the irrigation we tweaked slightly moving a few heads and changing nozzles, really just regular maintenance and the drainage here is very good. The two new items technology-wise for us moving in here are the forced air system, SubAir, and the Toro Turfguard Wireless Sensors. They both performed very well, with the SubAir we were able to blow hot air through the drainage and kick start the turf so that we were actively growing when we played our first game on March 31, whereas in the past the grass would be green but we would struggle through the first 2 weeks of April if the weather was bad and would potentially have worn out areas after the first month of the season.

The SubAir also allowed us to have some kind of air movement under the Terraplas while the field was covered during our concerts. It is a tool that we found we used a lot and helped us out a lot. The

Turfguard Sensors monitor soil temps, salinity and moisture, they also became something that I checked everyday and found very helpful, numerous times through the year I checked them for moisture and decided against turning the irrigation on, letting it go for one more day. They don't replace actually walking the field and pulling plugs to check moisture but are a very helpful tool.

We do not have anything new planned for 2010, I just plan on improving what we have with what is in place. The other huge item for us moving into the new building was that we installed infield mix that we had made to our desired specifications, I worked with Grant McKnight of Natural Sand and we came up with a mix that is roughly 54% sand, 26% clay and 20% silt, the mix performed really well and we received rave reviews from Mets players, coaches as well as many visiting players and coaches. We could spend pages talking about the infield mix but it held together really well, took water really well and overall allowed us to have more events on the fields without sacrificing playability.

ST: Do you have any recommendations for the next groundskeeper with brand new, expensive field?

Deacon: The advice that I would give is to stick to your guns, there are a few things that I thought would be better if they were done a different way and after a year in the new building am still of that belief. Talk to other people in our industry and other industries and try different things out, if you want to try a new mound clay put it in one bullpen, build little test plots to see how different infield materials perform etc. Overall I am very happy with all the new technology that we were able to use and will keep exploring looking for new ideas. ■

Drainage system *flexibility* needed at Citi Field

Editor's note: *This section was supplied by Steve Cooper of SCA Communications, steve@scacommunications.com*

The playing field at the New York Mets' Citi Field is state-of-the-art and actually floats. Because of the flexibility of the field, the drainage system needed to be designed so that it would move with the field. For this reason high-density polyethylene (HDPE) pipe (Advanced Drainage Systems, Columbus, OH) was selected due to its ability to flex and maintain joints. Sections of the pipe are perforated to allow water from the field to enter and to be drained.

Built on reclaimed marsh land at Willets Point just south of LaGuardia Airport, the stadium is on piles imbedded into the bedrock. The field, however, was designed to be independent of the open-air stadium to accommodate future, if any, settling.