

# F.O.Y.

Field of the Year

## Gulf location, drought challenge crew in Corpus Christi

**Whataburger Field**, home of the Corpus Christi Hooks, AA affiliate of the Houston Astros





**W**hataburger Field, home of the Corpus Christi Hooks, AA affiliate of the Houston Astros, was awarded the Sports Turf Managers

Association's 2009 Professional Baseball Field of the Year Award. The crew was led by field superintendent Garrett Reddehase, who was promoted after the season to take over duties at AAA affiliate Round Rock. He credits full-time assistant Josh Brewer and season crew members Eric Ortiz, Robbie LaCount, Brady Tumlinson and Ryan Servantes for their valuable contributions to winning the award.

Whataburger Field is located on land once covered by cotton warehouses at the Port of Corpus Christi, TX. Large, oceangoing vessels navigate the channel that runs just beyond the stadium. Prevailing southeasterly winds create significant issues with turf salinity and irrigation. In 2009, the area went through its worst drought since 1917 and saw average temperatures 4 degrees above normal. Reddehase says they received only 3 ¼ inches of rain from January to August, and half of that came in 1 day.

These conditions created challenges; the crew was forced to hand water many areas of the outfield because the irrigation system was not able to provide complete coverage due to gusting winds and high temperatures. But Reddehase & Co. successfully kept the playing surface in stellar condition, aerifying and managing the sodium levels, even

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after 13 games in a 4-day tournament, part of a 34 games in 33 days stretch.

Whataburger Field was completed in 2005 and last year saw nearly 600 hours of action, plus another 225 hours of concerts, banquets, charity events and corporate parties. The field is TifSport bermudagrass and includes patches of GN1 and common Bermuda scattered throughout. It is over-

seeded in mid-December with 400-600 pounds of perennial ryegrass. It features a 12-inch sandy rootzone on top of 4 inches of pea gravel.

Each year the infield skin is laser-graded and new material added (nearly 11 tons of Diamond Pro calcined/vitrified clay in 2009). Last year the bullpens were renovated; approximately 1,500 square feet of turf 5

inches deep (root removal included) was removed from each bullpen. Four tons of sand and crushed brick was added and leveled so turf could be applied. Six 250-square foot pieces of turf were added to each pen; the turf came from the New Orleans Superdome. Each piece weighed nearly a ton because the used turf included the rubber infill. Result of this renovation is savings in water, fertilizer and man hours.

“The Corpus Christi Hooks are thrilled to have Whataburger Field recognized as the 2009 professional [baseball] field of the year,” says Hooks general manager Michael Wood. “From the beginning of his time here, Garrett has shown a drive for excellence and a passion to grow his knowledge base and skill set. That, along with the ability to assemble and manage a top-notch field crew, has enabled him earn the respect of his peers. We’ve always known he did a great job; we’re excited to see others acknowledge it.”



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**My crew is the most important asset to the success of maintaining a safe environment for players as well as being aesthetically pleasing to the fans, and a place the community can be proud of.**

**SportsTurf:** What if any changes do you expect in your maintenance practices at the AAA level?

**Reddehase:** I plan to keep my maintenance practices pretty much the same while in Round Rock. In Corpus Christi, we had to monitor the sodium level on a regular basis with the ballpark being located next to the bay, and constantly battled the soaring winds that came off the Gulf. Other than that, it's pretty much the same routine. If you can stick to that routine, it's going to work out for the most part.

**ST:** What's the most important piece of equipment or product in your program?

**Reddehase:** The most important piece of equipment in my program is not equipment at all. My crew is the most important asset to the success of maintaining a safe environment for players as well as being aesthetically pleasing to the fans, and a place the community can be proud of. I was very fortunate to have a great group of guys that I could trust and depend on, and the front office personnel as well. We rely on the staff as a whole to help with tarp pulls and other situations that came up, and their response is greatly appreciated.

**ST:** How do you communicate with the front office, managers, coaches and players?

**Reddehase:** The front office of the Corpus Christi Hooks and Ryan-Sanders Baseball are amazing. It's truly a group effort, from upper management pulling tarp in their slacks, to ticket guys helping us out with the infield drag when we are short on staff. Tina Athens, our stadium operations director, helped us in many ways; she always has the best interest of the field, and our crew in mind. Our President, Ken Schrom, is a very approachable guy. With his experience in the big leagues he understands the effort



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# Whataburger Field Annual Maintenance, 2009

## DECEMBER

400 lbs. of perennial ryegrass blend applied with an Accupro 2000 rotary spreader. Edges applied with rye using a Scott's drop spreader.

## JANUARY

A fungicide applied to help control various problematic diseases such as pythium and brown patch. Fertilization with 350 lbs. of Andersons 20-5-10. Mowed every other day in two directions as well as edged and cleaned up extra rye in skinned areas. Reconstructed the game mound and bullpen mounds, including changing out rubbers and building to MLB specifications. Automatic irrigation started at 2 AM, a practice that is continued through August.

## FEBRUARY

An estimated 75 tons of screen clay was delivered. The entire skinned area was tilled and clay brought in for laser-grading. Mowing was increased to a different direction every day except Sundays. The height of cut was 3/8 inch. After determining the rye was fully

established, a 350-lb. application of Andersons pre-emergent plus fertilizer was administered. High school games began at month's end. Hand watering the infield and sidelines began.

## MARCH

Height of cut raised to 1/2 inch to reduce wear and tear. Andersons 20-5-10 was administered at the beginning and end of the month (500 lbs.). Preventive fungicide was applied. Mowing in a different direction every day but Sunday continued. The field was aerified using 6-inch pencil tines and lightly topdressed after the annual Whataburger College Classic. Hand watering infield and sidelines continues. Walk mowing the infield in a star pattern begins.

## APRIL

A foliar application consisting of Floratine products and liquid iron was applied at the beginning of the month for an Astros exhibition game. Mowing in a different direction every day at 1/2 inch continued save Sundays. The field was verticut in two different directions and aerified at month's end. The cut height was lowered to 3/8 inch and mowed in four different directions. The field then was topdressed and fertilized with 600 lbs. of Andersons 25-5-15 containing Nutralene. Mowing resumed 2 days later. Hand watering infield and sidelines continues.

## MAY

Foliar applications were made every 10-14 days. Height of cut was resumed at 1/2 inch. Cutting continued in a different direction every day and field was double-cut every other day. Hand watering continues.

## JUNE

Foliar applications were applied every

10-14 days depending on schedule. A herbicide/fertilizer was applied at medium rate to the field as preventative for crabgrass. Field was verticut in two different directions and cores pulled with the aerifier. Topdressed at a medium rate and rolled the field with a 3-ton double-drum roller. Ammonium sulfate was applied at a high rate, watered in and now mowed for 2 days. A growth regulator was applied to help with scalping several days later. Mowing was resumed at 1/2 inch every day. Hand watering continued.

## JULY

Foliar applications were applied every 10-14 days depending on schedule. A surfactant was also applied to help with hydrophobic areas. Mowing continued every day, height moved to 9/16 inch because of drought-like conditions. Hand watering continued on infield and sidelines, as well as branching out to parts of the outfield.

## AUGUST

Foliar applications were made every 10-14 days depending on schedule. Hand watering continued on infield and sidelines and spots in the outfield became a regular practice. Field was aerified with solid tines and a surfactant sprayed to help with hydrophobic areas.

## SEPTEMBER

Foliar applications made every 10-14 days depending on schedule. Hand watering continues. At month's end verticut very aggressively and pulled cores with aerifier. Height of cut raised to 5/8 inch and every day mowing continued.

## OCTOBER/NOVEMBER

General maintenance. Mowing continues every other day. Verticut in November to prepare for overseeding. ■



that goes into maintaining the field. Our GM, Michael Wood, has provided constant support and trust which motivated me and my crew tremendously. I tried to have an open-door policy with the players and coaches. At the beginning of the year, we would introduce ourselves as a staff and I would let them know if something wasn't playing right, or if they wanted areas a different way to let me know so we could accommodate them the best we could. Before long, we had to check and see who was pitching that night because every pitcher wanted the mound a different way!

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

**Reddehase:** The best piece of turf management advice I have ever received was from former Hooks and Express field superintendent Brad Detmore. He would always tell me "the players and coaches notice how well the field plays, and the fans notice how green the grass is. How the field plays is the most important, and if you can please them all, you're on the right track."

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

**Reddehase:** Balancing work and my personal life are very challenging. Fortunately I have a very understanding wife that knows my



career requires a lot of my time especially during the season, so I try to make up for that lost time when the season is over!

**ST:** What have been the most important reasons you have progressed so well in your career?

**Reddehase:** I think some of the reasons I have been fortunate to progress in my career are that I have a great work ethic, and have been blessed with a great crew. The Ryan-Sanders organization was willing to take a chance on me and provide us with the means to maintain a great field. I have had the privilege of working for and learning from Brad Detmore, and I have been able to build a great network of people of whom I can call and ask questions. A manager can never know enough in this career, so asking questions, and researching information is a huge part of our success. ■

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