



Dirty dozen, plus two, tournament tips

TOURNAMENT PREP starts days and weeks before the first pitch of your tournament. As we all know, most tournaments are 20 minutes of work and 2 to 3 hours of waiting for the work to start again. We have tried to put together some tips for use during your tournaments to make them go smoother and to make your job easier. These are just some of the tips that we have thought about and hopefully, they can be some that you can use during your tournaments this year.

Time your fertilizer schedule to build up to the tournament and beyond. Turf needs to be durable as well as green. The Tournament Schedule should be incorporated in your year long program/plan that you follow. You will be building toward the tournament to make it look the best and be healthy to withstand the increased amount of traffic

that your fields will have over the course of the tournament. Also, the schedule should allow for adequate time for your field to recover and your plan should have enough maintenance practices in place after the tournament to help your field recover.

Out of Gas? Equipment in good repair? Has the oil been changed, tires properly inflated, reels sharpened/backlapped, grease fittings lubricated, fluid levels checked, daily fill all machines with fuel. There is nothing worse than running out of gas on the infield groomer while trying to drag an infield before the games.

Under Cover? Arrange ahead of time where the crew will be located during the “downtimes.” A tent, pavilion or some other place that is covered where the crew can relax and be during the games is essential. Taking care of the crew should be a top priority! If you are the head groundskeeper, taking care of your crew is

Facility & Operations

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important due to the fact that they are a reflection of you and your work during the year. If they feel well and properly hydrated, fed and not sunburned, then they will put forth their best effort during the tournament. Also, during the long days, a relaxing chair/chaise lounge is a great place to rest during the downtimes.

Readiness; prepare for worst case, hope for the best case. Be prepared for weather. A meeting a few weeks in advance of the tournament to devise an action plan as to whose call is it to tarp or not. Once the game starts, if you have a tarp, it usually rests on the shoulders of the umpires along with the groundskeeper. You need to have a reliable weather forecaster on your team to call for updates. Also, let him know that he is just as important as the person tamping the mound, and he can feel a part of the tournament. He can even alert you to changing weather patterns/forecasts.

Not Hungry? If you have a chance to eat, eat. Hunger can cause short tempers, especially in tense situations which will happen during long hot days of tournaments. Eat foods that are not very heavy on your stomach. Pizza is easy, but not always best. If food is not easily accessible at your venue, plan ahead and pack a cooler with sandwich meat, cheese, bread and condiments for the crew.

Always Look Professional. Shirts tucked in, a crew that looks uniform looks professional when on the field. The crew is just as important as the teams taking the field for play. Look like a team, act as a team. In order for you to be taken seriously as a groundskeeper and as a crew, you need to present yourself in a professional manner. If you look professional, then you will automatically earn the respect of the umpires and tournament coordinators.

Manage Your Crew. Have a plan for each crew member pre and post game. Delegate duties, making sure you have qualified people (full timers in position to get the job done in a timely manner. Use volunteers, which are very important keys to success, alongside full time people so they can be better equipped to help with future tournaments.

Everybody's Job is Safety. Everybody's ultimate job is making the field safe and playable. This is not just limited to the field; make sure the shop area and equipment are safe for the crew to use and be around. Be sure to remove all items from the field that are not needed for play. The last thing you want to do is leave nails or hand tools (chalk, rake, tamp, shovel, spool of twine, etc) on the field for a player to find later. Do not leave anything behind and the last person leaving the field should be responsible for checking the playing area to make sure that all items are removed.

Never leave home without a change of clothes. The bag that you pack should include socks, shoes, shorts, shirts, toiletries, towel, pullover for night time and rain gear. Two pair of shoes is important, one for morning prepping time of the field and one pair for the pre game and post game work. Dew will make your shoes just as wet as rain.

Take time to drink plenty of water or sports drink. Dehydration can lead to serious health problems that can put you

in the hospital if not careful. Be sure to avoid the drinks with lots of caffeine and carbonated water during the tournament, or any other drink that might dehydrate you. Staying hydrated with water or sports drinks can make you more effective when working on the fields and make your time spent at the tournament more enjoyable and rewarding.

Togetherness. As a Charles Bloom, SEC Baseball tournament director once said, “The grounds crew is the glue that holds Tournaments together.” The entire crew needs to understand that one part of the crew is just as important as the other. If you are repacking bullpen areas, dragging the field or chalking, they are all important duties that need to be completed to the best. We all want to give the team that plays in the championship game the same field as the first teams to play in the tournament.

Inventory All Materials and Hand Tools. Some items you need to have on hand as you prepare for the tournament: field conditioners, drying agents, mound clay, marking

chalk, and enough tools to accommodate your crew, e.g., rakes, tamps, drag mats, etc. The list of tools needed vary depending on the size of your tournament crew and the facility being maintained. A backpack blower is often overlooked as a tool used for fields. It can be used at night or early mornings for cleaning dugouts, blowing out your lips from the day of play. It is a time saving tool. Try not to use the backpack blower during the day as it disrupts other fields or coaches trying to prep his team for the game.

Pre and Post game entrance exit, where does the crew enter the field? Do we have easy access to the tarp? Who is responsible for opening the gate for field access? Is the way we enter the field also going to be used for emergency vehicles? If so, don't block the gate with equipment. Who is responsible for closing the gates and securing it before game?

Sunscreen for Use. Waterproof/sweat proof sunscreen SPF 30 or greater is ideal. Bullfrog works great too for prevention of sunburn. We also recommend using a straw

hat, with a wide brim on it to prevent any unnecessary sunburn on the forehead. Some aloe might be nice to have in the refrigerator just in case someone does get a little sun burned.

We encourage hosting tournaments to be able to spotlight your facility not only locally, but regionally and nationally also. It is a great opportunity for people to view all the hard work that goes into making tournaments a success. ■

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