

F.O.Y.

Field of the Year



Infinity Park

wins Schools/Parks Sporting Grounds Award

LED BY MANAGER of turf operations Joshua Bertrand, the crew at Infinity Park in Glendale, CO a suburb of Denver overcame a flooded field in June to win the Sports Turf Managers Association's 2009 Field of the Year in the Schools/Parks Sporting Grounds category.

Opened in September 2007 with a 3,000-seat game-day capacity, Infinity Park is one of the only rugby-specific stadiums in the United States and is operated by the City of Glendale. A storm dumped more than 2 inches of rain in 30 minutes last summer during which construction activities

around the park had placed filter socks on all the storm drains surrounding the park.

"Approximately three acre feet of water couldn't enter the storm drains and so built up behind a silt fence and "green" screen chain link fence, both of which soon collapsed," recalls Bertrand. "A wall of water went into our parking lot, and then into the stadium and on to the pitch."

Quick work by the Public Works crew greatly minimized the damage, though water did begin to build to a depth of 2 feet on the pitch surface. Public Works took the lids off of drain clean outs on three corners of the surface, Bertrand said.

After the drains were open, brooms were used to push the water toward the clean outs. This helped to keep dirt and debris in the water suspended until the water cleared the drain. After the water was removed, roughly 3 hours after the flood began, a Toro Pro Sweep machine was used to remove all large debris like wood chips, soda cans, leaves, trash, etc., and most fine soil settled around the outer edge of the surface since the pitch is crowned with a 0.5% slope.

Core aeration and sweeping did remove some of this soil, Bertrand said, but a challenge remained with this layer of fine soil

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since it greatly reduced the pitch's ability to drain, and allow oxygen and water to the roots.

Public Works crews are not directly assigned to assist Bertrand with pitch maintenance but he says they are 100% dedicated to the pitch and his efforts. This group includes Bob Taylor, director of public works, Gene Hazlett, Vickie Allen, Kevin Brown, Jody Yonke, Diego Aguilar, David Frawley, Paul Herrera and Matt McCord.

RUGBY MAINTENANCE CHALLENGES

Bertrand says the unique challenge of managing a rugby pitch is the culture of the sport. "It is an all-inclusive sport, where the unwritten rule is all players who show up to play get to play that day," said Bertrand. "After a match, teams will take a short break and then begin playing a "B-side" match, featuring players who didn't play in the "A-side" earlier contest.

"If there are still players who haven't played, there's a "C-side" match and that will go on until everyone has played a

match. So before I understood this, I would have the pitch ready for two matches and five or six might be played," he said. "For example, I would make two buckets of divot mix for two matches played but now I base it on hours played. If matches last 8 hours, I make up eight buckets of mix. I still struggle with scheduling individuals to clean up after games but I do have a much better feel for how late the games will go on match day."

SportsTurf: How has the recession affected your operations?

Bertrand: There have been two effects of the recession on my operations. First are the changes in vendors operations and staff. The sales people I have worked with in the past to buy seed, fertilizer, and equipment, etc. have been downsized, or are now covering a larger sales territory. This is difficult since in the past I have developed trust and rapport with sales people, but now they are gone, or they can't give me as much personal attention. The change in vendors operations is the biggest effect I have noticed.

The final impact of the recession is now there is a large and deep talent pool of avail-

able employees. From a hiring stand point it's great to have highly qualified candidates apply for open positions. For those in the job market, it is a tough situation. My advice to all the May college graduates is hang in there!

ST: What changes to your maintenance plans are you making this year, if any?

Bertrand: The biggest change I am going to make this year is to try and limit double cutting of the pitch. It is not a big change, but a small change that I can make to benefit the environment (I should save about 5 gallons of diesel fuel each week) and help keep costs down. I have found by making just a few, smaller changes in the maintenance program, they tend to work better and have chance of becoming ingrained into the day-to-day aspects of the program. I can actually see if the small changes are making a difference either good or bad. When you make changes in too many aspects of the maintenance program, it is tough to see what changes have an actual benefit (or degradation).

ST: What's the best piece of turf manage-



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ment advice you have ever received?

Bertrand: The best turf management advice I ever received came from Troy Smith, CSFM, with the Denver Broncos, while we were sitting in Sky Harbor Airport waiting for the same flight after the last Phoenix STMA conference. We were discussing business on a very informal level, when the subject of synthetic fields came up. Troy's advice to me was not to "wrap your mind up in it." I took this advice as not to become personally involved in decisions largely out of my control. There are situations where I have total control of the decisions, others where I have no control. Often the decisions that are made in which we have no control over may cause us to dwell on that decision and to spiral into a pattern of negative thoughts. I now make it a point to openly accept decisions I have no control over and then make the best of the situation. Easier said than done, but at the end of the day, I am much better for it.

ST: How do you balance your work and personal time?

Bertrand: I don't. I believe in work hard, play hard. I work an awful lot, but don't play very much though I do make a point to spend time with my family every day. I have an incredibly understanding spouse (and thus children) who is very supportive of the job I do and the time it takes. I make an

effort to let the children come to work with me on game days if they want to. This provides an opportunity for them to see how hard work pays off. They love walking the pitch with me, setting up for games. In return I make special events with family or friends just as much as a priority as the work demands. Just so long as I make anniversaries, birthdays, and major holidays I stay on the good side of life.

ST: If you could have any turf manager job in the country for a week, what would it be and why?

Bertrand: Geez, I can't go international with rugby? Maybe take over at Ellis Park Stadium in Johannesburg, South Africa, site of the inspirational movie "Invictus"? I'll take INVESCO Field at Mile High the week of June 13-19, if Ross Kurcab, CSFM would let me. On my pitch that week we will be recovering from the Churchill Cup pool play, the Super League national championship, Club championships, and College All-stars. All the games are intermixed and overlap, so there is a lot of play on my pitch the 2 weeks before that week. Recovery weeks are especially hard since you have been grinding hard hours to get the games in, but recovery week is when the surface really needs your attention and effort. I'd take INVESCO field that week, since the U2 concert will have just ended and they

will be pulling up the flooring, cleaning up, etc. Yes, it will be a recovery week for the crew at INVESCO too, but when you use flooring you get a real chance to see first-hand what the plant will and won't recover from. Plus, I'd like to see first-hand how Ross, Cody Freeman and crew will handle the reconditioning with the Desso GrassMaster surface. Knowing Ross, there will be a cool PowerPoint presentation coming in 2011.

ST: What if any changes were made after the flash flood to try and prevent another?

Bertrand: The biggest change was filling in the parking lot next to the stadium with 12,000 cubic yards of dirt, then vacating the street next to the parking lot and filling that with another 12,000 cubic yards of dirt. This raised the elevation about 14 feet around the stadium. (I have a tremendous amount of pull with the Mayor; just kidding!) The reality is the dirt was brought in to complete a 16-acre community park and open space addition to the stadium (scheduled for completion late this month). The construction activity last year and subsequently the run off controls installed in the catch basins (filter socks) surrounding the stadium greatly attributed to the flood. I am confident once the construction is finished, another major flooding scenario will be mitigated. ■

