

F.O.Y.

Field of the Year



>> **Above middle:** Field set and ready for start of 3-day rugby tournament. **Above right:** Brandon posing with the Bobcat auger attachment used to drill 4-foot holes for rugby goalposts.



Crew in Columbus handles all comers, wins Field of the Year Award

"During the 2010 season we encountered many challenges. The summer was one of the most difficult in recent years for this region, with high temperatures and very little rainfall."

BRETT TANNER, director of stadium grounds at Columbus Crew Stadium, Columbus, OH led his own crew to the Sports Turf Managers Association's 2010 Professional Soccer Field of the Year Award. That crew includes full-timers Ray White, Ben Jackson and Chris Fox (who recently left to go to Red Bull Arena); and part-timers Gary Rasor, Mitch Litz, Lucas Easterbrook, David Vuchenich, Ryan Martin and intern Brandon Thrower.

The facility was built in 1999, one of the country's first soccer-specific stadiums. It also sees clinics, rugby, lacrosse, football, disc golf, concerts and festivals each year. Turf varieties include Midnight Star and Brilliant Kentucky bluegrasses, and Barllineum, Pinnacle 2 and BarBeta perennial ryegrasses. The drainage system has 4-inch perforated pipe on 15-foot centers, running to two 8-inch collectors.

From Tanner's entry package:

"During the 2010 season we encountered many challenges. The summer was one of the most difficult in recent years for this region, with high temperatures and very little rainfall. Upon completing the season, we will have hosted five different sports on our field: soccer, football, lacrosse, disc golf, and rugby. On top of that we've hosted numerous concerts and festivals.

"Wear areas on our field include goal mouths, bench areas and the referee runs; to help combat this we typically spot overseed before events and this has helped us maintain turf coverage in these areas.

"A main concern during this busy schedule was trying to shift wear patterns during non-Crew (the professional soccer team and stadium owner) events. During the season we hosted a number of high school soccer matches by using temporary white paint and shifting our soccer field out of its standard field size. By doing this we stopped wear in the goal mouths, which of course get heavy use during Crew training and matches. We would place two pieces of TerraFlor over the goal mouth to help stimulate growth. We were heading toward no re-sodding of the goal mouths as this application was written in mid-October.

"We hosted a rugby tournament for the first time ever, which meant we had to install goal posts. We asked advice of our peers for adapting our field, and borrowed some collars custom made for rugby goal posts from fellow MLS groundskeeper Bret Baird in Colorado. By reaching out and asking for advice from those who had done it before, we were able to reduce our field damage and install the posts in reasonable time.

"Wear areas on our field include goal mouths, bench areas and the referee runs; to help combat this we typically spot overseed before events and this has helped us maintain turf coverage in these areas. We also broadcast seed throughout the 'diamond' wear pattern typical of most soccer fields. The players and officials cleat in this seed and we avoid having to put heavier machinery on the field.

"Monday following weekend events we will rotary mow the en-

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» For Major League Lacrosse, the field is shifted northeast to move wear out of the middle.

tire surface to help remove dead plant tissue and normal debris from the events, and follow up by going back and filling any divots by hand using a sand/seed mix.”

SportsTurf: What changes have you made to your maintenance plan for 2011, if any?

Tanner: We were fairly pleased with the plan we utilized in 2010, with such a large number of events and high temperatures it was a kind of a back to basics year.

Early this year we had a problem with our turf beginning to “grain” or grow more laterally than vertical. We brought in a verticutter to help thin the pitch out a little and stand the turf up. It did a great job and we plan on trying to incorporate that practice more as the summer winds down, as needed in the fall, and early next season.

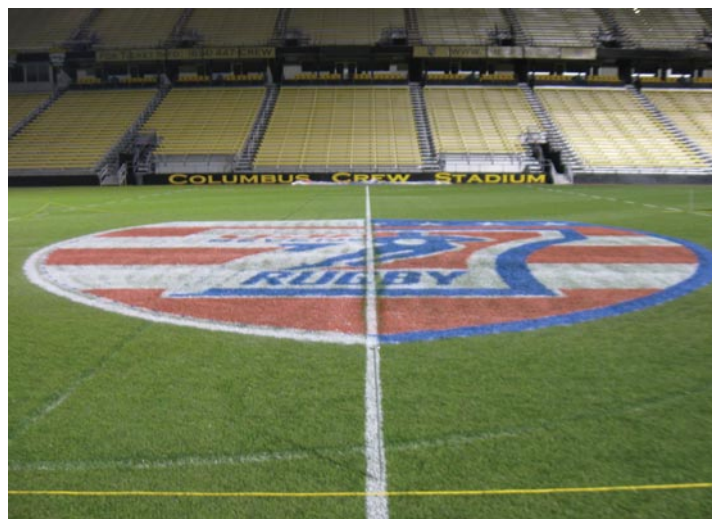
I also can not say enough about the opportunities available for members of STMA, local and national. I’ve have met many people who I have been fortunate enough to gain valuable knowledge and people I can always contact for advice or opinions when in need.

We also contract out our deep-tine service and we are going to begin deep tine coring more often. We want to try and open up deeper channels to help elevate the heavy compaction after concerts and multiple events.

ST: What’s the best piece of turf management advice you have ever received?

Tanner: I’ve been extremely fortunate to work for some great people in this industry, both on the sports and the golf side. I always made it a point to listen and learn by watching how those people got the results they did, good and bad. For the most part, I felt that I learned more during the challenging times than when everything was going smooth and as planned. I really focused on how they handled the challenges, whether it was flooding and downed trees on a course, disease outbreak right before an event, or players and coaches concerned with the field conditions. So I guess it’s tough for me to narrow it down to just one thing, I am just extremely grateful for those who took the time to pull me aside and show me something and or explain a practice or problem. It was those little things that I remember and grew from the most.

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Above Left: Only the two squares of sod were removed for rugby; here is first set of posts in south end. **Above right:** Halfway done with rugby stencil. Due to the high temperatures, we had to work through the night into early morning to prevent stencil burn.

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

Tanner: I am very lucky to have two understanding assistants. We all communicate well together and are able to distribute off days between the three of us when we get breaks throughout the season. So far it's worked out well and we have been able to take days off when needed. It doesn't do anyone any good to come into work for multiple weeks straight, I put a high priority on getting them "away" when we can. Our season starts in March and runs through mid-November so we need to have a little time on our own. At the same time, I know that I can count on them to be here if need be. My fiancé is also a major factor in what I am able to accomplish here at work. She is extremely understanding and helpful when it comes to the long hours during the season. I know that it's extremely difficult to manage a relationship with the hours the industry requires, but I've found that constant communication helps relieve unexpected schedule conflicts. All it takes is a quick call.

ST: What's your most valued piece of equipment and why?

Tanner: It is not equipment; I would have to say it is my staff. For the most part, there are always back ups for equipment if it breaks down or is unavailable. It's the guys that are out there doing the work that are the greatest value to what we do here. Between the stadium pitch, the two training fields 20 minutes outside of town, and the vast landscape we are responsible for, I put a lot of trust in the grounds staff to keep me up to date with what's going on at the multiple sites. Everyone invests a large amount of time to insure we are able to provide the best results we can in every aspect we manage or are involved with.

ST: Are you yet involved in "sustainable" management practices? If so, what are you doing?

Tanner: At the stadium, we have made a conscience effort to reduced use of herbicides and insecticides in the grounds. As far as the management of the pitch itself, we do not use herbicides or insecticides, and carefully monitor our fungicide program. It's a preventative program but on an as needed basis, no pressure, no

applications. Daily monitoring and adjustment of our irrigation programs is implemented at both the stadium and practice facility, we try not to do the set it and forget it programs. All of our equipment service is done in house and the used motor oil is recycled, there is also a stadium wide recycling program. ■

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