

F.O.Y.

Field of the Year



Kari Allen, CSFM, sits on the mower. Next to her is grounds manager Peter Charcut, with student workers Rodkym Jackson and Jack Holden (in front).

Allen overcomes high traffic volume to win 2nd 2010 Field of the Year

Kari Allen, CSFM, the sports turf manager for Benedictine University (BU) in Lisle, IL, won two Sports Turf Managers Association Field of the Year Awards for 2010, one for softball and the field we highlight this month, for College Baseball.

Allen, who has her bachelor's degree from Michigan State in crop and soil sciences with the turfgrass management option, spent 7 years plus an internship as a groundskeeper in minor league baseball before getting married and looking for more stable working hours. She works for Sodexo, which has the contract to maintain the athletic fields at BU, and credits her part-time and seasonal staff for helping to win the award: Peter Charcut, Tim Swanson, Rodkym Jackson, Jack Holden, and Pat Collis. BU baseball players also volunteer to assist during the season, she said.

The field features Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass and annual bluegrass and Allen reported she sometimes top-dresses problem areas with calcined clay. "Even though sand is far less expensive per ton than calcined clay," she said, "I have difficulty getting approval to purchase proper topdressing sand."

Allen said, "There is no subsurface drainage system in place. Surface drains appear to have been pieced together and 4-inch tile added to areas someone thought necessary. I don't know what, if anything, these lines tie into."

"There is a drain tile with several catch basins running the perimeter of the warning track; this tile empties onto the ground just outside the outfield fence and the inconsistent grade also causes problems with surface drainage," she said.

Allen said the high amount of play this field supports is her biggest challenge. "This field is used for both college varsity and junior varsity teams' practices and games, a summer prospect team's practices and games, a senior men's league games, high school games, various tournaments, showcases, and youth league games."

"To combat problems affiliated with overuse, I frequently oversee the areas commonly prone to wear, even before signs of wear become visible. Since implementing

this practice, the field has shown fewer or smaller bare areas than without the seed. I also try to get the players to spread the wear; while I have not been in getting the teams to use all of the turf protectors for batting practice, I have been able to convince most of them to move the shag screen around slightly, move off the foul lines to warm up, and move conditioning drills to a grassy area just outside the playing field.

"Another challenge I face is the length of time the tarp remains on the field. Unfortunately, common practice is for teams to tarp the field and leave it on for 2 or 3 days until the next game or practice, regardless of weather conditions. I have met with coaches and the facility manager, laying out the facts explaining why the tarp should be out for the least amount of time possible and while they are in agreement with me to my face, getting them to implement a proper regimen is another story!

"So I enacted a couple of techniques to help the situation as best I can. I pull the corners of the tarp in whenever possible so that if the grass burns, a distinct yellow square is not visible. The infield grass is certainly off-color but a distinct square of it set on a canvas of healthy, darker green grass is not evident. If I am unable to pull the corners in, and the grass burns, I will sometimes use a mowing pattern to disguise the burn as best as possible.

"Of course, neither of these 'solutions' addresses the issue of disease. For that I was finally able to get some blowers to go under the tarp this year. They're not exactly what I wanted but getting some air movement under there is better than none. I also try to make preventative fungicide applications to the areas covered by the tarp. This doesn't happen as often as I would like, and once in awhile I do have to make a curative fungicide application. I also overseeded the entire field with newer, more disease-resistant varieties." ■



>> **ABOVE:** One and a half strips of sod were replaced along the back edge of the skin in November 2009. Some of the sod was cut much thinner than the rest, and even though it was starting to root quite nicely, once the players started using the field, they were tearing the thinner sod up. In April and May, I seeded over the areas getting torn up, and it was completely filled in by the end of May. >> **BELOW:** Close up of what all the splotches on the previous picture looked like after removing the tarp. Teams began using the field immediately after removing the tarp, so the next day, I raked these areas open and applied fungicide.



>> **ABOVE:** This photo shows the low area in right field, where grass got torn out with aggressive squeegee rolling, at its worst, from a distance. Small wear areas visible by the bullpen, second base, and umpire area.