What's your infield mix?

Editor's note: *We asked some veteran infield skin managers about their infield mixes and why they chose that combination and/or products:*

ERIC BLANTON, Reno Aces

I have Gail Materials Collegiate blend infield mix. It consists of a 60% sand/20% clay/20% silt mixture. It was chosen due to its high clay and silt content and NO cinder content. It holds together very nicely with very little cleat marks after games. Gail Materials has continuously tried to make their products better no matter what outcomes they have. They are a company that strives to be the best and that also was another reason I chose their product.

GEORGE MARSHALL, Stetson University

Here at Stetson University in Florida we use a clay field approximately 6 to 8 inches deep on a sand base. We mix in with it Turface Pro League Red that serves as our playing surface. We laser grade the infield annually in the off season, and will do it twice if necessary depending on the rainy season. Usually after laser grading we will add around 1 to 1 1/2 tons of Turface and play with it after that to get it to our liking. We try and aerate with our Toro aerator a couple times a year to aide in drainage and fight compaction.

LARRY DIVITO, Minnesota Twins

Our infield mix is from Natural Sand in Slippery Rock, PA. Grant McKnight is the owner there and he is the one who engineered this infield mix. It is somewhat similar to what the Mets used for their installation at Citi Field. Bill Deacon gave me some great anecdotal evidence of its performance. As for the blend, I would leave it to Grant to discuss. (see p. 22)

DAN DOUGLAS, Reading Phillies

Infield mixes in general have improved dramatically in the past 25 years. Suppliers are now producing much cleaner products and are more conscientious of the makeup of their mixes. There are also a lot more choices of amendments. Whether a mix is loose, tight, dry, sticky or just an unappealing color, there is an amendment available to correct the problem. In most cases, I recommend finding a fairly local supplier of infield mix (to save on trucking costs) and changing any characteristics of the mix you don't like with amendments.

The infield mix at FirstEnergy Stadium in Reading is a combination of Professional Diamond-Tex (50% sand/32% silt/18% clay) and amendments. Professional Diamond-Tex is tan in color, dries out quickly, does not get sticky when wet and, notably, is produced only 30 miles away by Martin Limestone.

The infield skin is renovated in March when we: add new infield mix, if needed, to help meet grade; Stabilizer is applied; the top 2 inches are tilled and the infield skin is laser graded and rolled. A topdressing combination of Turface Pro League and Diamond Pro Vitrified Infield Conditioner is maintained during the playing season. The amendments have aided in overall moisture management, footing, ball bounce and aesthetics of the infield at FirstEnergy Stadium.

JIM WIGGINS, Tomball (TX) ISD

We just recently rebuilt both our softball and baseball infields as both were in dire need of an overhaul from the bottom up. We ended up taking about 4 inches out of the baseball field and 2 inches out of softball. Starting with the new subgrade of 60/40 sand clay mixture we had blended, the contractor, 4E Turf Services, and then began the compacting and laser work on the subgrade. Both fields had Diamond Pro Vitrified Red added as the new topdressing and then rolled and nailed multiple times to achieve our finished product. After 10 years of amending and working on our fields we were able to finally redo both fields and are completely satisfied with our finished product.

In the past we have used Klacon and Turface as infield conditioners and have used and still use Klawog mound and home plate clay for those areas. Getting used to the new vitrified product compared to our calcined products will be a new learning tool for us. I was comfortable with my Klacon and Turface products, and still have them in our

infield mix ▷

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baselines, mound and home plate areas on the baseball field. I feel water management will become even more important now with this new conditioner, but look forward to the new challenges this may bring.

During the redo portions of both fields and with Rain Bird's help, we added new Falcon high speed rotors to both infields. These dirt zone sprinklers have been time savers for us over the years. We finished off the redo's by adding a quarter-inch of sand topdressing to both fields. Bring on the seasons which start in the middle of January here in Texas!

CRAIG SCHLENDER, Ball Diamond Fine Sports Turf

I would have to say my favorite infield mix would be a 60% sand/40% clay silt mix, 6 inches deep, incorporated with 6-8 tons of calcined clay, on a regulation baseball field, with 1 ½ to 2 tons of calcined clay topdressing. I prefer the calcined clay amendments for good moisture holding ability on hot, dry days and the wicking ability on rainy, wet days. The addition of calcined clay on very wet days, used as a drying agent, doesn't change the mix or color in the future. The silt and clay provide a high quality, solid base for spikes to get good traction.

As a field manager, I like a higher clay, silt content with the ability to keep a high moisture content in the mix so it has a very solid, firm base feel; 60% sand, 40% clay on days with rain approaching, backing off on water, so that it will wick more moisture when the rain falls.

As a consultant, I try to prescribe a mix suited to the manpower of the grounds crew staff. If there are 1 or 2 crew members, working on four or more fields every day, the infield mix will need a larger sand content as watering and drying will not be able to be maintained by the grounds crew. The mix will stay softer when dry and will be more playable when wet. I still like to see calcined clay amended to the mix. A 70% sand, 30% clay, silt mix works well for a recreational mix.

On all fields, surface drainage and available water is the most important part of a good infield. On high-use complexes where time is a factor of maintaining good moisture in the mix, I suggest the addition of high out-put irrigation heads, so water can be added at night or early morning. This should be set up with an automatic shut off should a rain storm show up.

Whatever the mix, if the moisture content is right, the mix will play pretty well. I prefer a darker mix to minimize the glare for players and fans. In Wisconsin, where I consult on many fields with low budgets, amending seems to be a considerable option due to trucking costs. Additional factors include true surface drainage, ability to water enough and normally the addition of calcined clay.

Some fields are more than 1% slope due to various reasons, and in these circumstances, I will use a higher clay content and vitrified clay as a topdress, as it will stay put better because it is denser but wicks less water. ■