

# F.O.Y.

Field of the Year

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## Daily tournament conditions make for Field of the Year winner

**T**HE 2010 SPORTSTURF MANAGERS ASSOCIATION BASEBALL FIELD OF THE YEAR AWARD in the Schools/Parks category was presented to Vince Henderson, turf manager for Glen Allen Stadium, Glen Allen, VA at last January’s STMA Banquet in Austin, TX.

Henderson, who might be the only turf manager in the country with a BA in Economics, is responsible for maintaining 88 irrigated athletic fields, seven clay tennis courts, and 23 lawn and landscape areas. Before coming to work for Henrico County in Virginia 7 years ago, Henderson had used his turfgrass management degree from Horry-Georgetown Technical College in Myrtle Beach as a golf course superintendent for 12 years.

Full-timers on the award-winning staff included Jason Melton, Tim Coleman, Steve Speas, Ed Branch, Mike Acors, Mike Turgeon, Eugene Dodson and Lee Dodson. They were assisted by seasonal employees Phillip Saunders, Ethan Arnold, and Dave Maidens.

Glen Allen Stadium was built in 1993-94 and the field was completely renovated in 2006-07. Henderson reports the field saw about 715 hours of action last year, all of it baseball. It features Tif-Sport bermudagrass, maintained at a 5/8-inch height of cut, and is

overseeded with Allied Seeds ASP 6000 series blend @ 500 lbs. per acre, which is cut to 3/4 inches. The rootzone composition is 90% sand, 10% Dakota peat and the drainage system is a modified herringbone drain tile under a 4-inch gravel layer.

Henderson says, “The biggest challenge in maintaining this field is the amount of use it receives from March to November with the expectations that it be maintained in tournament condition every day. A typical week is practice or games Monday through Thursday, two games on Friday, five games on Saturday, and three games on Sunday. Of course, district and regional tournaments for Babe Ruth, American Legion and local high school teams are on the schedule, as are some college showcase games, various clinics and some AAU travel team practices.

“Our staff takes great pride in all of our 88 fields and strives to maintain the same safe and well-conditioned fields at all our sites. We work hard with the every day user groups to move around as much as possible during practice time, and we typically ask that batting practices be held in the cages to reduce wear on the mound and home plate.

“As you might expect we have the typical wear areas at first and third base, in front of the mound and walkways from the dugouts

## F.O.Y. | Glen Allen Stadium

to home plate. We have overcome the issue at first and third base by modifying the radius cutout to accommodate the players' cheating in toward home plate. We still must re-sod in front of the mound every August; it is simply the cost of doing business. The walkways to home have also been cut out to avoid re-sodding there. I admit I didn't want to do this but did so at the request of the County Manager and Board Supervisor for the district; it does require more daily maintenance but the look is consistent and it is not thin and patched.

"Another big challenge is that since the renovation in 2006 we have battled a major infestation of Spring Dead Spot. The first summer we patched some areas, aggressively grew in other areas, and treated with Rubigan at the end of summer. We used two half rates of 4 oz/1000 spaced 6 weeks apart. We had great results the following year but then we used only a single, full rate of Rubigan the following year, at the beginning of fall. The results were almost a complete reversal of the gains we had made the previous year. We have since returned to the two split applications with very good results."

**SPORTSTURF:** What changes are you making to your maintenance plan for 2011, if any?

**HENDERSON:** We are not making any big changes this year to our normal schedule, but I think we always try to tweak things to make better use of manpower and materials. The schedule for our fields pretty much dictates our daily routine and we try to keep everything game ready. Of course, weather always plays a role in what we do, but the stadium field drains so well that rain is usually not an issue for an event if we need to cover the infield.



## Monthly maintenance & fertility program

**AS SOON AS TRYOUTS AND PRACTICES START** in the middle or late February, the infield skin area is maintained daily, including the pitching mound and home plate areas. This practice lasts until the end of October. Amendments such as Turface and Quick Dry are applied as needed. Edging is performed as needed. Due to the structure of the root-zone we must irrigate almost daily from April through mid-October. Fertilization requirements vary depending on how much rain we get. In general, we apply approximately 6 lbs N/1000 sq ft per year to the outfield and up to 8.5 lbs N/1000 sq ft to the infield and sidelines due to the heavier traffic.

### January/February

In the past we have covered the field with turf blankets but it appears that the ryegrass actually performs better when not covered. The TifSport bermuda tends to green up late anyway and other than Spring Dead Spot issues it is usually not affected too much by winter. The biggest challenge this time of year is managing freeze/thaw conditions on the skin. We tend to let weather conditions dictate playability.

### March

The irrigation system is checked for problems and adjusted as needed. Soil samples are taken for analysis. The field is mowed as needed, which usually is 1-2x/week in March. The skin areas are maintained daily. Freeze/thaw conditions can make dragging a challenge but typically by the middle of this month temperatures are not an issue. Base paths and the infield arc are edged as necessary. Ronstar @ 3 lbs AI (0-0-7 carrier) is applied for pre-emerge weed control. We also fertilize the ryegrass @ .5 lbs N/1000 sq ft.

### April

Practices and games are now daily events. Mowing frequency is increased to 3x/week. We fertilize in mid-month @ .75 lbs N and K per 1000 sq ft.

### May

Mowing frequency is 3x/week in all areas. Height of cut is reduced from  $\frac{3}{4}$  to  $\frac{5}{8}$  inches. Turf is fertilized with 1.5 lbs N/1000 sq ft to push the bermuda out of dormancy.

### June

Mowing frequency is still 3x/week except during major tournaments when we mow daily. Ryegrass is completely transitioned out with Revolver during the last week of June. Turf is fertilized with 1 lb N and K per 1000 sq ft.

### July

Mowing is reduced to biweekly with a Primo application @ .25 oz/1000 sq ft. This practice seems to reduce stress in high-traffic areas. We continue to fertilize @ .75 lbs N and K per 1000 sq ft. We topdress lightly with 100% sand during the second week to help reduce thatch and keep the playing surface as smooth as possible.

### August

We apply Primo @ .5 oz/1000 sq ft and continue to mow bi-weekly. We aerate the entire field with 5 x 5/8-inch coring tines, drag cores, and collect remaining thatch. We topdress and drag as needed to achieve smooth surface. Fertilize with 1 lb N and K per 1000 sq ft.

### September

We apply Primo @ .67 oz/1000 sq ft the second week of this month to prepare for overseeding. Fertilize @ 1.5 lb potash/1000 sq ft (5-10-30 with 7% Fe). Overseed with perennial rye at the end of the month (Allied Seeds ASP 6000 blend) @ 500 lbs/acre. We discontinue mowing until the rye is strong enough to withstand cutting, usually about 3 weeks. We roll the turf as needed for play.

### October

Raise the height of cut back to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches and restart mowing operations around the middle of this month. Fertilize @ .75 lb N/1000 sq ft.

### November/December

Mow as needed. Fertilize as needed with no more than .5 lb N/1000 sq ft.





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

**HENDERSON:** I'm not sure I can point to one piece of advice and say that it is the best. When I first started in the turf business I tried to work for people who were successful and learn what made them successful. I learned something different from each that I believe that I have retained over the years. The key is to be confident in your decision making, but at the same time remember that you still have more to learn. Mistakes will happen, but you have to recognize it and learn from the experience. I have never worked for them, but I still love listening to guys like Bob Campbell and Mike Goatley talk about their experience in this industry. I've been growing turf in the golf industry or sports turf industry for 20 years now, but if I listen to either one of them for 30 minutes, I will take away something I can use on a regular basis. So, I would say listening is very important.

**I am very fortunate to have a staff that is very dependable and a management that is very supportive of the work we do.**

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

**HENDERSON:** Fortunately, the balance is much better now than it was in the past. I'm not exactly sure why, but the golf industry seemed to consume more time than sports turf. In either case, when you really like your work and love having time with your family, balance seems to take care of itself. It certainly helps that Kris and Haley are very understanding of my work. The hardest part to balance is how much control you give your staff. Due to the number of fields we maintain I have to be able to trust the staff to perform their tasks well. I am very fortunate to have a staff that is very dependable and a management that is very supportive of the work we do.

**ST:** How are you dealing with any budget restrictions that seem to be hitting all municipalities now?

**HENDERSON:** Just like other municipalities we have had to do some belt tightening. We have gone through our program and tried to find savings where possible, but still deliver the same or better customer service. With that being said, we have had tremendous support from Recreation & Parks Management, the County Manager's Office, and the Board of Supervisors. Their vision and leadership has greatly helped us through these tough economical times.

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

**HENDERSON:** Didn't the turf industry invent "sustainable" management practices? I think in the current economical environment and the scrutiny of the turf industry in general requires us to use as many of these practices as we can. We are proactive in our management practices to be good stewards of the environment. We have not ventured into battery powered mowers as of yet, but I wouldn't rule out the possibility. We have always taken periodic soil tests to make sure we are on target, but we are currently working on nutrient management plans for our sites based on these test results. As far as organic fertilizers, we have used quite a bit over the years, but I don't think we could ever achieve the turf quality we want with a strictly organic approach. We have made really good use of quality compost in the construction and renovation of native soil fields.

**ST:** What job would you like to be doing in 10 years?

**HENDERSON:** Hopefully, I will still be working in the County of Henrico. I don't think I will ever be too far removed from turf. Now, in about 15 years, maybe I will be changing cups at some golf course before my 9 AM tee time and then catching a local football or baseball game in the afternoon. ■