

F.O.Y.

Field of the Year

Ashley Ridge High School Softball Field, Summerville, SC

Level of Submission: Schools/Parks

Category of Submission: Softball

Head Sports Turf Manager:

Bobby Behr

Title: Athletic Director

Education: Master's Degree

Field of Study: Education Leadership

I was named the athletic director of a new high school and immediately applied to take an independent study course on the Principles of Turfgrass Management offered by the Professional Landcare Network and The University of Georgia. I am responsible for 85 acres of school grounds.

Full Time Staff: Adam Davis



I must also mention the fact that we have four alligators in this pond that migrated in from the surrounding swamp.

THE SWAMP

Original construction date: 2007

Size: 44,000 sq. ft.

Total hours used: 340

Variety(s) of turfgrass(es): Celebration bermudagrass

Overseed: Prior to overseeding we verticut and sweep the field.

I hire an outside company to perform this. We overseed with a perennial ryegrass, Interlude, at a rate of 600lbs per acre. We use a starter fertilizer of 18-24-12 at a rate of 200lbs per acre. We apply the rye in one direction on the first application, then come back 3 days later and apply the second round in the opposite direction which gives a cross hatch planting to the field.

Drainage: French drain every 10 feet

I added more biostimulants, soil conditioners, and we installed the crushed brick warning track which doubled my maintenance cost for 2011. We installed a 10-foot wide warning track around the entire perimeter of the field. The track was composed of crushed brick and we used 50 tons of material. We had to move 17 sprinkler heads away from the fence, 10 feet across the warning track, to the edge of the new grass line. My sports turf class performed the work on spreading the crushed brick and moving the sprinkler heads. We hired a third party to move the brick with a Bobcat onto the warning track. This new addition added 30 hours of labor our yearly total of 430 in 2011. The softball field will go completely unattended during the off season from last year because we do not have a sports turf class this year. I have gone through

three teachers in 3 years. The first two could not handle class room management and left education totally. The last teacher was moved to the district office as a science interventionist for the district. Adam works on the fields alone. I have several student volunteers this year who help, but are limited in there ability to run equipment.

Adam is also my football equipment manager and must be at all the football practices and games. With only two of us working on the fields we just don't have enough time to keep up with the baseball and softball until fall sports are over. We must, unfortunately, use a triage approach to management. Adam keeps the grass cut, but does not have time to work on the skinned area and warning track.

I also encountered a problem with my central irrigation system that feeds our fields from a 3-acre pond. I noticed the fields were turning brown and started a check procedure to see what was wrong. My pump was not working so I knew the problem had to be with the intake valve. I discovered that we had a problem with water weeds clogging the 4-inch intake valve and shutting our pump down. I had to don my chest wadders and have two of my students follow me into the pond in a 14-foot john boat. Adam Davis was my "Bay Watch" lifeguard in the event I went under. I must also mention the fact that we have four alligators in this pond that migrated in from the surrounding swamp. When I went in they came up within 20 yards to watch me. My kids in the boat were scared I would turn it over and they would fall out and get

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eaten by the gators (I am the one in the water and they are scared!). They had their cell phones out taking pictures of the gators and texting it to friends. I eventually changed the intake valve which had totally collapsed due to the weeds around it. This happened two times in one month, at a cost of \$640 each time, which led to me hiring a pond maintenance person who applies chemicals twice a month to keep the weeds down.

We have Hunter sprinkler heads (I-35's) on all of our fields. I again noticed the fields turning brown in circular patterns and discovered that the heads were not rotating 360 degrees. I had to change out eight of the heads on the main part of the baseball field throughout the summer. I turned the old heads in to the vendor I



bought them from and was given new heads. Hunter sent a representative from California to investigate the problem and determined that the heads were faulty.

SportsTurf: How did you educate yourself about improving and maintaining your fields?

Behr: When I was named the Athletic Director I went online

to try and find a correspondence course in turf management. The University of Georgia offered a professional certificate in turf so I enrolled. I had to get the head of my guidance department, Pat Tolliver, to proctor the two exams required. It took me several months to get through the course, which was like an Advanced Placement Biology class. This gave me the book knowledge I needed and confidence to jump into an agrarian area that was somewhat overwhelming. I also had Dr. Bert McCarty, a turf professor at Clemson University, on speed dial, and he was a tremendous help.

SportsTurf: What are your specific responsibilities for field maintenance, if any? What do find most enjoyable? What task is your least favorite and why?

Behr: My responsibilities are to make the turf green by applying the fertilizers and products that will accomplish the task. This includes analyzing soil samples with Bill Scribner who helps me balance the pH issues with the agronomic problems to select the proper fertilizers and nutrients that will build the strongest root-zone. My sports grounds manager, Adam Davis, is responsible for cutting, painting, striping, watering, and the skinned areas. Adam also is responsible for the PCI charting. I find the most joy in watching my field turn a luscious green and then how Adam can stripe the patterns into the field. The kids truly love to play on our fields too.

My least favorite task, as well as Adam's, is bringing the field back from the dead each spring. We do not have the manpower to keep up with the field during softball's off season. Adam has to sod cut all the edges, hand dig and rake the crushed brick warning track where the grass has grown in, bring clay into the skinned area and edge all the lines. This process takes several weeks and we will bring Steve Weaver, grounds maintenance, Gage Holsey, Ivan Moreno, and Grant Opolus who are student volunteers, in to help with this mammoth project.

SportsTurf: Did you have to get creative in finding the budget to implement the improvements that led to this award?

Behr: I am given \$35,000 to cover all 85 acres of school grounds. My district maintenance director, Rick Rogers, will help me in purchasing sand and renting equipment to topdress, aerate, and verticut. My principal, Karen Radcliffe, will help me with funding from her general account if I need assistance. My Superintendent, Joe Pye, has been great in allowing me to purchase the right equipment to manage the fields. I bring in Alan Wilson, a CSFM, to do heavy topdressing, verticut, and sweep the fields twice a year.

SportsTurf: What changes, if any, are you considering or implementing for the winning field in 2012?

Behr: We built a crushed brick warning track and moved 17 sprinkler heads last year. This year we have relocated the quick connect coupling from behind the pitcher's mound to the warning track. The sheer amount of work that we must do at the beginning of the season is equivalent to rebuilding a softball field each year. We are currently having issues with our irrigation water that is high in sodium. Amending the soil and keeping my grass alive is my biggest concern for this year. ■