

PATRICIA WILSON FIELD, Stetson University, DeLand, FL

CHALLENGES

Having a very limited travel budget is offset by our ability to host many invitational tournaments each year. We may range from 1 to 3 weekend tournaments during our month of fall ball and 6 to 7 weekend tournaments during our championship season in the spring. The past 3 years we have also hosted our local High School District Tournament, as well as our own Atlantic Sun Conference Tournament. With our own conference schedule, weekend tournaments, and regular season games, we have averaged 90-100 games per year on our field. Additionally, daily practice is conducted on our field by our own team.

This creates a very special challenge since the majority of playing time is during February to May, when our bermudagrass is dormant. This is a huge reason why we overseed with winter ryegrass. This helps with the wear on the field which also aids in the cosmetic looks and appearance.

Hosting teams from all over the country makes a pleasant experience as well. We work on the main wear areas (outfield positions) throughout the season with additional seed and fertilizer.

We removed bermuda turf in high shade areas of landscape and replaced it with crushed red rock (warning track material) in our picnic area. Redesigned the irrigation in common area to operate more uniformly and to compliment the landscape changes over the years. A wetting agent was introduced to facility and water management program.

Additionally we paint our infield therefore the infield must be wet prior to painting. We did have times when we had to wet the lines and batter's boxes with a backpack sprayer, prior to painting, when the reclaimed city water was turned off. We have now designed and built a water device onto our sprayer to enable us to wet and paint at the same time on a dry infield.

- ⊙ **Level of Submission:** College
- ⊙ **Category of Submission:** Softball
- ⊙ **Head Sports Turf Manager:** Steve Barnard
- ⊙ **Title:** Field Maintenance Technician
- ⊙ **Education:** Associate Degree, General Studies
- ⊙ **Work History:** Former foreman for the City of DeLand's Sperling Sports Complex for 25 years. Complex includes 35-acre park (one full size baseball field; three adult softball fields; three soccer/football fields, and four practice areas, a total of 22 acres of bermuda turf).
- ⊙ **Full-time staff:** Steven Barnard, field maintenance technician; Frank Griffin, head softball coach; Vanessa Bataille, associate head softball coach; and Joanna "JJ" Payette, assistant softball coach
- ⊙ **Original construction:** 2002
- ⊙ **Turfgrass variety:** Tifton 419 bermudagrass
- ⊙ **Recent renovation:** In 2010, the infield was tilled and laser graded; 23 tons of clay plus 1½ tons Turface added to infield; additional bullpen added on first base side; new scoreboard with full video display; replaced netting as needed throughout the complex; additional drainage added by practice area, hitting area, and first base dugout to help with washouts; palm trees added to landscape.
- ⊙ We laser grade our infield annually or bi-annually to maintain the standard we set for ourselves; additions to the complex as well as improved existing facilities to reduce long-term cost and maintenance; maintain drainage slopes.
- ⊙ We have crushed red rock (warning track material) within the facility (excluding infield); St. Augustine grass in the exterior perimeter of the facility; additional enhancements occur daily with new innovations and reconstructions.
- ⊙ **Overseeding:** We overseed in late November or early December after an application of preemergent. We use typically 500 to 700 pounds of Eagle Supreme perennial ryegrass on our entire complex.
- ⊙ **Drainage:** Sideline drains; slight valleys built into terrain emptying into culverts to retention area; field itself has a 1% grade to outfield.



SportsTurf: What channels of communication do you use to reach coaches, administrators and user of your facility? Any tips on communicating well?

Barnard: I have to unique advantage of the Head Coach, Frank Griffin, being my direct supervisor. This allows us to talk daily regarding the scheduling of the facility operations and planning around the team's practice and game schedules.

E-mails are used when mass information needs to be distributed to administrators, players and visiting groups. A member of our coaching staff and school site administrator meets with the visiting team representative to communicate the game day agenda and any policies and special needs request they may require.

A tip on communicating well is do not let small problems become big problems, address them early.

SportsTurf: What are your specific job responsibilities?

Barnard: Being the sole field maintenance technician for Patricia Wilson Field, I wear a multitude of hats. I am very lucky to have players and coaches that have pre and post-game duties to aid in the upkeep of the facility. Our players can put out and remove a full infield tarp with the proficiency that would make any major league grounds crew proud. They also help with the application of Turface on the infield when there is a weather issue.

Turf Maintenance: mowing, fertilization, pesticide application, aerification, top dressing, overseeding, water management, verticutting, ordering all products to be applied.

Irrigation: Repair and installation

Clay & Warning track: grooming infield and warning track areas, practice and game day set up, edging, rebuild and maintaining mound and plate with bag clay, refurbishing bullpens, raking, blowing or hosing lip areas, raking common warning track areas and keeping weed free, adding material as needed, aerivating infield.

General needs of facility: blowing and cleaning areas of batting areas, grand stands and sidewalks, repairs



and replacements of netting, windscreen and fences, help maintain garden areas along with ornamental beds, lubricating equipment, change oil and filters while doing any and all repairs that can be done in house, adjust reel mowers.

Participate in any and all projects or events during the year.

SportsTurf: What do find most enjoyable about your job?

Barnard: I find all aspects of turf management to be the most enjoyable part of the job.

SportsTurf: What task is your least favorite and why?

Barnard: The least favorite area I consider is to be the general facility maintenance tasks. Not that they are any less important in the day to day responsibilities but they do not generate my enthusiasm like growing good turf does.

SportsTurf: How did you get started in turf management? What was your first sports turf job?

Barnard: My first job was a Part Time position at the age of 17 years old with the City of DeLand, Parks and Recreation Department back in 1981 participating in a variety of field maintenance duties. After attending Junior College for 2 years and still undecided about a career direction, I met with Tom Sperling who was the Director of Parks and Recreation regarding a job opportunity in park maintenance. Four years later he entrusted me with the responsibility of supervising the Sperling Sports complex which was a 35 acre facility and over time became 22 acres of Bermuda. During that time I was fortunate to have Larry Nordman who was our Parks Manager to have as a mentor along the way. Before Patricia Wilson Field, Stetson Fastpitch Softball used Sperling Sports Complex to practice and play their home games. I met Coach Frank Griffin at this time which ultimately led to my current position.

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

Barnard: Turf care wise, due to soil analysis we increased our potassium rates and added in an advanced minor pack twice a year to aid in the deficiencies that arise in Florida soils. In the later part of 2011, we were able to implement a monthly wetting agent appli-



cation program which we were able to continue throughout the 2012 season which has proved very helpful.

Facility wise, we replaced or entire back stop netting, had the press box tower and grandstand painted. We were able to obtain our own triplex reel mower for the sole use of our facility.

SportsTurf: How do you see the sports turf manager's job changing in the future?

Barnard: We are always in a series of constant changes and adjustments. Pesticide regulations and conservations of water management will always be a constant challenge. With rising expectations and smaller budgets, it is important that good sound cultural practices are used. With the use of more modern technology and equipment we can perform some of these tasks in a timelier manner. With specific target dates to obtain each year and the windows of opportunities becoming smaller, by becoming proficient in organization and better planning skills it will enable the tasks to be met and completed on time and on budget. ■

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Field of the Year

Ludwig Field, University of Maryland

CHALLENGES

One special challenge has been a diminishing budget with increasing expectations. In 2009, we opened a \$500,000 golf practice facility and were made to maintain the course (\$41,000 per year) with no budget increase. The next year saw a ten percent budget cut which stretched our budget even thinner. So creativity, a lessened dependence on contracted help, and a lot of hard work allowed us to continue to provide the high quality playing surface that our teams deserve. Without the student-athlete, we would not have jobs

- ⊙ **Level of Submission:** College
- ⊙ **Category of Submission:** Soccer
- ⊙ **Head Sports Turf Manager:** PJ Ellis
- ⊙ **Title:** Director of Grounds, University of Maryland
- ⊙ **Full-time staff:** Mac Wallace, James Franck, Neville Kelly, Casey Rezendes
- ⊙ **Other crew to recognize:** Kurt Klinger, Alex Steinman, Ignacio Rodriguez, Trey Whelton, Curtis Lazar, Patrick Sajak, Seth Whitehill
- ⊙ **Original construction:** 2006
- ⊙ **Turfgrass variety:** Patriot bermudagrass
- ⊙ **Rootzone composition:** 100% sand
- ⊙ **Overseeding:** We overseed with perennial rye starting in late September and continue weekly applications for 4 weeks totaling 15 lbs. of rye seed/M. The ryegrass germinates in the fall and becomes the dominate turf in the early spring before being chemically transitioned out of the field in late May.
- ⊙ **Drainage:** Subsurface drains wrapped in gravel with bridging sand on top. Smaller field drains move water to larger perimeter drain to be carried off field.

L to R: Alex Steinman, Neville Kelly, Kurt Klinger, P.J. Ellis, men's soccer coach Sasho Cirovski, Casey Rezendes, Jamie Franck, and Mac Wallace.



in college athletics, so the turf manager has to be a problem solver by nature when it comes to fiscal challenges to ensure maintained quality.

The second and most daunting challenge is the weather. In Maryland, we grow bermuda grass during the summer and early fall, then overseed and encourage rye grass for the remainder of the fall, winter and spring. The opportunity to grow bermudagrass without any competition lasts only about 100 days. Once the rye grass is chemically transitioned in the late spring, an evaluation of the bermuda grass must be made quickly to decide if areas can be regrown, sprigged or sodded before summer camps start three weeks later. Growing this field in during a Maryland summer is a challenge enough; now add a non stop schedule of summer camps. Once camps begin in mid June, the field will not see any type of significant break (even a week off) until mid December. So, growing bermuda grass in with all this foot traffic is challenging and requires a full throttle, aggressive approach. This means mowing every day, fertilizing weekly, staffing weekends to keep an eye on field conditions so no problem goes unresolved for more than a day. It is important to have a high quality, dense bermuda grass stand for not only playability reasons, but for overseeding to ensure sustained quality for the rest of the year. If the field is not thick with bermuda grass during overseeding, the seed will not be protected from traffic and the rye grass will be spotty and the playing surface compromised leading to deteriorating future field conditions that will require more sod in the spring because the bermuda will not grow back in these areas. This leads to a higher cost to maintain the field and a lessened quality of the surface because bermuda sod does not perform nearly as well with high traffic levels as a field that you can grow the existing bermuda back.

SportsTurf: What channels of communication do you use to reach coaches, administrators and user of your facility? Any tips on communicating well?

Ellis: Our work unit is part of the Facilities, Operations & Events department within University of Maryland Athletics. Each facility and sport has a liaison that communicates directly with the coaching staff for every day issues. Generally, my communication with coaches goes through the liaison. However, coaches know I am always available to discuss field related con-

cerns through text messages, phone calls or in person. We also use a computer program called EMS (Event Management Systems) where all activities for each facility appear on a calendar making it easy to see when and where all practices, special events, and competitions will be occurring.

SportsTurf: What are your specific job responsibilities?

Ellis: As the Director of Grounds for University of Maryland Athletics, I oversee the playing surfaces and common grounds of all of our outdoor athletic facilities. We have a good mixture of artificial turf and natural grass surfaces. Our artificial turf facilities are Capital One Field at Byrd Stadium, Field Hockey and Lacrosse Complex, the infield of our baseball stadium and a practice football field. All of our natural grass fields are bermudagrass which include our soccer field, softball, practice soccer/lacrosse field, the outfield of our baseball stadium and two practice football fields. Also, a part of my job is oversight of the men's and women's golf short game facility. The facility includes two bentgrass greens, a Bermuda green and two Bermuda fairways. I manage the budget for all of the facilities and all resources needed. I oversee a crew of 6 employees made up of the following individuals: two assistants, Kurt Klinger (Assistant Director of Grounds) and Casey Rezendes (Superintendent, Holman Short Game Facility); three turf-technicians, Mac Wallace, Neville Kelly, and Jamie Franck; and one student technician, Alex Steinman, who is also our social media guru.

SportsTurf: What do you find most enjoyable about your job?

Ellis: The most enjoyable part of my job is the group of people I work with. We work together as a team and we have a great time doing it. We never go through a day without having a good laugh all while completing our work with the highest quality. I am a firm believer in making sure my staff works hard and has a good time in the process, regardless of the weather or obstacles in our way.

SportsTurf: What task is your least favorite and why?

Ellis: No question, tarping a field is by far my least favorite thing to do. It is a necessary task for our job for the playability of the

We spend a lot of time working with the coaching staffs on moving practices around to different areas of the field. That can be difficult with just one 100,000 sq/ft field. You always have to find ways to be innovative.

fields but the late fall and early spring tarp pulls can be brutal.

SportsTurf: How did you get started in turf management? What was your first sports turf job?

Ellis: I started out in turf management working for a landscape company in my hometown for couple summers in high school. I entered college expecting that is what I would go in to and learned about sports turf. My internship was my first sport turf-related job and that was with the Camden Riversharks an Independent League baseball team. From there I moved to Maryland and became the Director of Grounds in 2011.

SportsTurf: What are the major challenges in managing turf for so many different uses?

Ellis: The biggest challenge is getting the time needed to do our basic daily operations on the field. Our soccer/lacrosse grass field in the spring may have a men's and women's soccer practice and men's and women's lacrosse practice all in one day. We spend a lot of time working with the coaching staffs on moving practices around to different areas of the field. That can be difficult with just one 100,000 sq/ft field. You always have to find ways to be innovative.

SportsTurf: How do you see the sports turf manager's job changing in the future?

Ellis: I see my job changing in the future with the addition of the artificial turf to our football stadium and more outside events occurring. Concerts, soccer games and lacrosse games are just some of the outside groups that may rent the facility. The volume of events is something our staff hasn't seen before and requires additional preparation to make those events successful. ■

My time at Maryland: lessons in learning

By Jeremy Menna

“THE TRUE WONDER of hindsight lies not in its ability to clarify situations and events, but in its propensity to coat them with a glaze of dignity and glamour, even glory.” This was the opening line in Richard Rubin’s book, “Confederacy of Silence.” What Richard Rubin did not know when he wrote this book was that those 31 words accurately and completely summarize my time as the Director of Grounds for the University of Maryland Athletic Department, a job that I am honored and privileged to have had.

I could say that I went to the University of Maryland to share my knowledge of providing an efficient work atmosphere that produces unmatched results, but that could not be further from the truth. I was the one who was taught many lessons. I have since moved on to take part in an incredible opportunity to rebuild a once sought after and impressive sports complex near Cocoa Beach, FL, a complex that has since faded into disrepair and was purchased out of foreclosure. My next challenge; however, my previous challenge was the single greatest learning experience of my life.

I arrived at Maryland in June 2006 as the Assistant Director of Grounds at 24 years old. I was tasked by the administration to make the department a dependable and a consistently performing work unit. What I now know is those goals were significantly below the capabilities and talent that already existed in that shop.

I was promoted to the Interim Director of Grounds in March 2007 then moved into the role as Director shortly after that. I began to evaluate the crew and run daily operations the only way I knew how. I was rigid and unwavering, two qualities that would not let the creative ambition of this crew shine.

After consistent failures, on my part, to connect with the staff I decided to try a new approach, to connect on a personal level with my employees. The main area that was missing was trust in me, and trust is the one quality that does not come with the title of boss, trust must be earned. This was as simple as saying good morning consistently, asking how everyone was

doing, not being in a hurry to get to work if we were in discussion. Updating the shop hockey standings and playing our morning game of dominos was tops on my priority list. This meant that many times I would be working late to wrap up administrative duties that I could have finished during the work day but I chose, correctly, to be part of my staff.

It did not take long for the culture of the work environment to shift to a happy, welcoming, trusting, results oriented work unit that I would not trade for any all star. Every member of this group was the all star I wanted to work with. We truly worked to embody the slogan, “work to live, don’t live to work.” This atmosphere was rewarding at the highest level when the rest of the crew worked through breaks and lunch to make sure a staff member could leave early to catch their sons tee ball game or pick their niece and nephew up from school.

When hiring new staff I made sure that their personal qualifications and character was weighed more heavily than their profession achievements. If you were motivated and would fit in with the staff then there was a spot for that person. It was my responsibility to make sure that all staff is one step closer to where they want to be at the end of the day then where they were when the day started. The result of this mentality was more incredible than even I could have imagined. The average age of our staff was about 25 years old. The young staff respected and learned from the older staff. The older staff drew energy and excitement from the younger staff. Everyone was empowered to make decisions, to problem solve, to work with coaches. The work unit was trusted by all and widely known through the athletic department and “the guys that get it done.” This aggressive mentality allowed this generation of young sports turf professionals to learn through problem solving and making mistakes. This truly was a rapid development work atmosphere.

When I left Maryland, my assistant Patrick Ellis took my place leading the work unit. Patrick joined the staff in 2007 after he graduated from Penn State and worked his way into the Assistant Director

position and now the Director of Grounds. Seth Whitehill, interned in 2008, rejoined the staff the following year after graduation and is now the head groundskeeper for the Little League World Series. Casey Rezendes was a student employee while attending the University of Maryland and is now the superintendent of the Maryland Golf Team’s short game practice facility. Kurt Klinger interned in 2009 and rejoined the staff after graduation and oversaw budget tracking and budget development for the \$760,000 operating budget. Kurt is the leading candidate to take Patrick’s position of Assistant Director. Alex Steinman, STMA and KAFMO Scholarship winner, interned in 2010 and rejoined the staff in 2011. Alex’s future is extremely bright and has been asked by Dr. Mathias, professor in the Maryland Turf Department, to help prepare the Maryland Turf Teams for the STMA team challenge.

I truly believe it is the responsibility of the person in charge of staff to ensure their continued growth and development. What happened following the execution of this promise was nothing short of extraordinary. The grounds work unit was the most dependable in the department; the staff retention rate was almost 100% with interns returning because of our commitment to them. Everyone on the staff felt a high sense of ownership because of their ability to make the calls on agronomic practices, all the while having more fun than any group of people I have ever known.

I was truly honored to be part of this team and I can honestly say that no matter how busy we were or what jobs lay ahead, I always woke up looking forward to going into the office. I would love nothing more than see this staff be recognized for their great achievements in such a tough area of the transition zone to successfully grow high performance sports turf. A task this staff has performed well as anyone in the country.

I believe the leader takes the criticism and lets the praise pass to the staff, works harder than everyone and spearheads the most undesirable jobs, and has a commitment to everyone that works for him to ensure their continued growth. If this can be done, be prepared to see results that will induce a smile that can be seen a mile away. Unselfish is the best word to describe this mentality. However, to try to sum up my time at Maryland in one word or even 31 words cannot do justice to my experience, an experience that not only made me a successful young sport turf professional, but most importantly prepared me for success for the rest of my life. A life that I will always stop and smile at the thought of my time at Maryland. ■