

F.O.Y.

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 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

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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. ■