



>> **BELOW TOP:** New field in Omaha, Fall 2010.
>> **BELOW BOTTOM:** Werner Park in Papillion, NE, 2011 season.

Building two new fields in 3 years

BEING PART OF A NEW FIELD CONSTRUCTION can be looked at as either a blessing or a curse, however, once you catch the bug and have the opportunity to build one you may want to do nothing more but do it again. I looked at it as a chance to attain the elusive “perfect” field. I know it’s impossible and that’s what keeps me humble yet coming back for more.

I oversaw the installation of Parkview Field in Fort Wayne, IN (Single A affiliate of the San Diego Padres) in 2008, and then the install of Werner Park in Papillion, NE (Triple A affiliate of the Kansas City Royals) in 2010. Taking care of a 5 or 10-year old field is one thing, that’s common, but there’s not a text book or established man-

agement plan for a new one. The best thing you can do is talk to people who have done it before.

Much like custom building a car before it’s rolled off the assembly line, I was lucky enough to be brought on board during the install process and have input, which is often times not the case in the minor



leagues. All of a sudden you start thinking about changes you want and not problems you inherited. When it will make your job easier and your crew more efficient, go for it. I’m not talking about asking for heat or an air system, but simple things like quick connect locations, 3/4-inch hose connections like I have in my bullpens, or infield and

warning track cutout sizes. We intentionally offset the mound radius and made it larger in Omaha to minimize wear for our extra high school games. It may not be a cure all, but every little bit certainly helps.

Irrigation design is also a key importance. Most designers submit a neutral layout because everyone has different preferences. Head layout is extremely important especially on your infield grass and foul territory because a couple feet from center either way and your cutouts will always be wet. I also try to have the installer keep heads away from player locations to reduce a bad hop but also for maintenance. If I'm resodding or aerifying behind where the second baseman or shortstop plays, I don't want a head right there.

I prefer to manufacture or fix anything we can in-house which means we have a lot of tools and the same goes with our irrigation. Our remote controller for the system is such a time saver for locating heads (especially before aerifying) and running cycles without having to go to our controller located in center field. Along with that are our infield skin zones; I know the coverage is not always perfect, but it has benefits. We use it when the team is out of town to keep moisture in the skin, since the wind can wreak havoc if it dries it out, as well as between lower level games. High school doubleheaders are tightly scheduled and sometimes the only way to water is to turn on those zones for a minute or two; it's better than nothing.

Another thing is to know your material specs put in place by the field designer and to be approachable. Get a feel for how things should look and be installed and go from there. The better relationship you have with everyone involved from the general contractor to every subcontractor, the easier they will be to approach and talk about changes, but keep in mind the domino effect. It's hard to change one thing, whether it's an elevation, home plate diameter or pipe size, without that changing other things down the line, so talk it out with everyone.

Understanding what materials are being installed helps with the design but also the maintenance. My track material on both fields was a higher maintenance crushed lava material. As I came to find out, that meant

Taking pictures is the single best way to document the install and have some sense of assurance on what's below once it's covered up with sod and clay. I don't love to read, let alone take the time to write, but taking pictures tells a much greater story and says everything without saying anything.

extra watering and constant grading and dragging to maintain the negative slope for drainage. I understood that early enough and was able to purchase a large enough box grader and laser setup that not only allowed me to constantly work the warning track, but also allowed me to grade my infield skin whenever I needed. This multi-use need helped me sell the purchase to management.

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lows you to look back, compare and see many things that may have been missed on installation such as buried valve and drain boxes, head locations, even how the field drained before the sod was laid.

All contractors will tell you "We want you to be happy" or "If you're happy, then we did our job", so make sure you are happy. The potential problem with that is being too nice. Don't settle for "that will do" or "I'll fix it later", it will come back to bite you. I did a terrible job about this on my first field and a little better job (emphasis on little) the second go around. Don't make more work for yourself that you won't have time to perform in the spring. It's under-

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>> 2011 CREW for Omaha Storm Chasers. Left to right: Matt Kozeal, Gavin Cordaro, Roger Bettmann, Mitch McClary (head), Noah Diercks (assistant), Andrew Miller, and Troy Lorenz. Intern George Powell is not pictured.



>> 2010 CREW for Fort Wayne TinCaps, L to R: Adam Basinger, Greg Slee, Keith Winter (assistant), Dave Joest, Mitch McClary (head).

standable that the fine detail work may not be just how you want it, but edging, mound and plate construction, even infield skin grading should all be written in the specs and finished to a game-ready condition.

Sod is down, the infield is graded and mounds are built so now what? Depending how far along your budgeting and equipment process is this becomes a great time to get a feel for the field and equipment. If possible

completion 2 months ago, but keep at it. Many times the importance of this area and the timeframe it's needed in is overlooked. Just like irrigation is needed before sod is laid, the maintenance shop is a key part for prepara-

have everything lined up and see if it's possible to have the field handed over that fall. This is a great time to get a relationship with equipment dealers, demo their equipment and see what you like. It is also time to begin your fertility and fungicide program and get a feel for the products and the field.

All of this being said, don't lose sight of one of the most important areas of the whole job, the maintenance shop. By this time I'm sure your new home has been promised for



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>> **OPENING DAY** in Fort Wayne, April 7, 2010.

tion, organization, and storage before the season.

Attic stock materials may be built into the specs but storage of them is not. The last thing you want is \$5,000 of loose materials

sitting outside on a construction site getting contaminated. Plenty of work will need to be done come spring time and the last thing you will want is a disaster of a shop and materials when games start in the spring.

I faced this in Fort Wayne when the shop was promised in November and we finally were able to move equipment in 2 days before the team came into town in April for workouts. You make do, you get by and hopefully if there is a next time you've learned the importance like I did this time in Omaha. Everything goes so much smoother and more efficiently when you have organization, no matter what the setting is.

There will always be challenges on every field, new and old, but the more you know about your field the better prepared you can be to keep an issue from turning into a disaster. Relationships are key in this industry and just about everyone is willing to talk and help out, as long as you are willing to ask. Don't make that the hardest part. ■

Mitch McClary is head groundskeeper for the Omaha Storm Chasers.

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