

Q&A



BY DR. DAVID MINNER

Professor, Iowa State University

Questions?

Send them to
David Minner at
Iowa State University, 106 Horti-
culture Hall,
Ames, IA 50011
or email
dminner@iastate.edu.

Or, send your
question to
Grady Miller at
North Carolina State University,
Box 7620, Raleigh, NC
27695-7620, or email
grady_miller@ncsu.edu.

Mad Professor

We played district finals on a baseball field you helped with last year and it was an amazing surface; how do we get that at our field? The victory was nice but our guys really felt like they were in the big leagues because of how the field looked and played, fast and true.

Gilbert, IA

Thanks for the good words. It has been fun to sit at the games and listen to the comments about the field, especially when the boosters, coaches and entire community can share in the decisions they made to improve that little corner of their world.

It really starts with one person that has the burning desire to instill pride in their players and the community. That person could be you, as a parent, athletic director, booster club supporter, or, in this case, head coach Chris Hill from Story City, IA.

The “if you build it they will come” dream seems to always resurface somewhere in the haze of an Iowa summer night. In September 2010 the infield was regraded, top-dressed with sand/compost, and reseeded at 5 lbs/1000 sqft with a blend of NuGlade, Total Eclipse, Nu Destiny, and Rugby II Kentucky bluegrass. We pushed it with 3 lbs of N during the fall grow-in and another 2 lbs N and more topdressing the following spring. We used an Eastman rotary striper mower set at a half inch to grow in the field and since then we have stayed with the same mower set at ¾ inch. It gives a great pro look to the field and the rear roller helps keep the field smooth. It takes about 1.5 hours to mow the infield and dugout areas

and Coach Hill does this faithfully three times a week.

This year we will be using Primo growth regulator to reducing the mowing to once every 5-7 days. One thing to remember is that the newer “low mow” Kentucky bluegrasses are very slow to establish; fall seedings seldom get tall enough to even mow. Through the spring they remain below a half inch, are slow to fill, and often stay within the seeded drill row. Don’t expect to use the field in April if you seed in September. I suggest seeding in mid-August or at a time that will result in two normal mowings before vertical growth stops in the fall.

About 3 weeks into the playing season and by the third week in May the bluegrass finally took off and the bluegrass density teamed up with the Easton Striper mower to deliver the “wow” factor that the players, coaches, and community had just never experienced, when the field is right the hair still stands up on my arms too. The players look better, the ball looks bigger, and the enjoyment factor goes up. I’ve been eating more walking tacos, but I don’t think that’s field related. See <http://www.iowa.turfgrass.org/BaseballMinner.htm> for a more detailed description and pictures through the first season in 2011.

After the district playoffs field watering was cut back and the turf went through some pretty noticeable periods of wilting and then it happened. Those unmistakable plate-sized purple patches of sunken and wilted turf appeared. It was the dreaded Summer Patch caused by the fungus *Magnaporthe poae*. Curative fungicide applications just don’t work on this disease and we help-

lessly watched as the beautiful smooth surface of less than one year quickly became filled with pock marks and bad hops, luckily the ball season had ended. By September, each diseased depression was hand raked and filled with Barrister Kentucky bluegrass because of its NTEP reported Summer Patch tolerance. All the varieties we used had good Summer Patch tolerance but it is important to note that the disease still developed and that it occurred in the first year. Usually it takes a few years for the turf to mature before Summer Patch becomes a problem.

Two cultural factors that we were fully aware of also contributed to the disease outbreak. Forcing growth with heavy fall and spring nitrogen was necessary to produce sufficient cover for the May baseball start date, but it also favored Summer Patch development. The ¾ inch mowing height produced a remarkable playing surface but it also encouraged this disease. Increasing the mowing height to 1.25 inches may be considered if we can’t effectively manage the Summer Patch problem during the 2012 season. Our goal was to use no herbicides and only compost topdressing as fertilizer. The field density has kept the field nearly weed free and only a little hand weeding was required.

Unfortunately we are now using a preventative fungicide to control Summer Patch; two or three applications of Heritage applied on 25-day intervals that started May 15. So, I’m mad about inciting this disease problem, I’m mad about having to use a fungicide on a high school field, I’m mad about how slow the bluegrasses establishes, but most of all I am happy to tell you that a little pride in your playing field goes a long way toward high school memories that last a lifetime. ■



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» Image 1: Field ready for district playoffs in June 2011 with no Summer Patch showing. Image 2: Summer Patch scars on September 2, 2011 before repair seeding. Image 3: Summer Patch scars still visible on May 2, 2012 after repair seeding in September 2011. Kentucky bluegrass seedlings won’t reach mature grass height until the end of May.