

F.O.Y.

Field of the Year



Infinity Park, City of Glendale, Glendale, CO

Level of Submission: Schools/Parks

Category of Submission: Sporting Grounds

Head Sports Turf Manager: Joshua Bertrand

Title: Manager of Turf Operations

Education: Master's Degree

Field of Study: Management & Organization

Work History: seasonal, City of Boulder in 96. City of Boulder Athletic Field Maintenance technician from 97-99. Assistant turf manager University of Colorado from 99-02. Certified Turfgrass Professional 02. Denver Public Schools Athletic

Field Technician 02-07. Manager of Turf Operations, Infinity Park, Glendale 07-current.

Full Time Staff: Noel Harryman

Students, interns, seasonal, part-time staff: Bob Taylor, Gene Hazlett, Vickie Allen, Kevin Brown, Denise Neahusan, Diego Aguilar, Matt McCord, Jody Yonke, Paul Herrera, Will Truesdale, David Frawley.

Original construction: 2007

The playing surface was renovated within the past 2 years, including a complete irrigation lateral replacement on playing

surface. The irrigation lines were not installed according to design specifications. Lines were punctured in hundreds of places after an 8-inch deep tine aeration. The lateral replacements took about a week from start to finish. The sod was harvested out in hopes of being able to put it back down as soon as the lateral was replaced. However, the harvest was unsuccessful and new sod had to come in on the 4-foot wide strips that were removed, says Bertrand.

Irrigation lines not installed to correct depth according to design specifications. Lateral lines ranged from 6-inch depth to 9-inch top of pipe. The line depths were found when we deep tine aerated at 8-inch depth. We feel that deep tine aeration is an important cultural practice and wanted to be able to continue this practice in the future.

The renovation was very successful in that we accomplished our goal of burying the laterals to their proper depth. The new sod is a challenge in matching up color but this only a aesthetic issue and does not affect playability of the surface.

Soil composition: USGA sand

Turfgrass varieties: Midnight, Awesome, Impact, NuDestiny-Kentucky bluegrass (70%), Caddieshack, Accent, Top-gun-Perennial ryegrass (30%)

Overseeding: Overseeding is done now strictly with Kentucky bluegrass. The pitch is overseeded four times a year (last week of March, first week of May, mid-June, and last week of August) at a rate of 10#/1000sq.ft. The seed mix is Midnight, Awesome, Impact, and NuDestiny. For divot repair we use a 1:3:1 ratio of pre-germinated seed, USGA sand, and fertilizer.

Drainage system: GraviTURF designed by Dan Almond of Millennium Sports. Using 4-inch ADS drain pipe, located on 15-foot centers, set in pea gravel 10 inches below the surface.



CHALLENGES

On May 7, 2011, while Animal Kingdom won the 137th Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs, the turf crew at Infinity Park was facing its biggest challenge in 2011. Infinity Park hosted the largest Kentucky Derby party (outside of the actual Kentucky Derby) in the United States. More than 5,000 partygoers spent 4 hours celebrating the Kentucky Derby with open bars, a live band and watched the race live on the Jumbotron. Ladies wore extravagant hats, sundresses and high-heeled shoes, men wore derby hats and plaid pants. The result was 100 cases of champagne, 150 cases of wine and more than 140 kegs of beer being consumed. Six months before the event the decision was made not to rent flooring for turf protection. At that time, it was felt that partygoers would spread out over the surface and traffic spots would be minimal. However, the month before the event, the infrastructure of tents, catering stations, bars and portable toilets was increasing in number (doubling +).

Another challenge was the home Raptor Rugby team was tremendously successful and making a strong push to the playoffs. The Raptors would be hosting a playoff game the following weekend and Infinity Park would be hosting the National Championship games the first week of June 2011. One month before the event the pitch department began careful planning. Developing "worst case" scenarios (the worst case was a snowstorm during the 2 days before the event) and action plans to address concerns in each scenario:

1. Overseed the pitch a week before the event (anticipating 2-week germination, just in time for the potential playoff game the following weekend).

2. Water heavily 4 days before the event, before set up and staging, in anticipation of hot conditions and being unable to water with the event infrastructure in place.

3. Use a combination of Enkamat and plywood (courtesy of Bret Baird at Dick Sporting Goods Park). All potential wear areas, access areas, and anything heavy had this combination layer of protection under it.

4. Carefully scheduled the setup and staging of tents, portable stages, catering, refreshments, décor, etc., to minimize the amount of time and impact on the pitch surface.

5. One key policy was everything going on or off the pitch surface had to be done under the direction or supervision of the pitch department. This prevented a flood of traffic at the end of the event as all stakeholders tried to get their items off the pitch at the same time.

The most unique challenge of managing a rugby pitch is the culture of the sport of rugby. Rugby is an all-inclusive sport, where in the culture, the unwritten rule is all the players who show up to play get to play in a game of rugby that day. Games can and will continue all day regardless of weather or any other outside limiting factors.

SportsTurf: What channels of communication do you use to reach coaches, administrators and users of your facility?

Bertrand: We use three basic channels of communication at the City of Glendale: e-mail, meetings and direct communication. Email is the primary form of communication for us. It allows for mass/multiple people to receive the message and it leaves an electronic trail. Those two items make email a valuable form of communication.

Next, I or someone from my staff, attend the weekly operations meeting with administration, coaches, facilities and operations. I am always amazed how well events work when everyone is on the same page. Also, I liked sending different people from my staff on occasion to those

meetings because they often came back with a new appreciation of all that goes into running a team and a stadium operation. Finally, I firmly believe in direct communication. Never be afraid to walk into the head coach's office, GM's office, etc. if you need an issue resolved.

ST: Any tips on communicating well?

Bertrand: I never walk into an office without being prepared—knowing exactly what I want to ask or tell the person. Only ask one or two “yes” or “no” questions and get out of their office, rather than ask a question that would require a lengthy explanation. The quicker you are in and out of their office and are respectful of their time, the more receptive they will be to your needs.

Next, don't view all meetings as a waste of time. Learn what makes people tick, watch the dynamics and learn from others. It's much easier to learn the do's and don'ts when you're paying attention to how others interact and what causes satisfaction or frustration with the bosses.

Lastly, (and the credit goes to Dave Rulli for this recommendation) respond to all emails sent to you (except when you are cc'd) within 24 hours. I sometimes struggle to respond within 24 hours, but communication is becoming increasingly faster and so must our ability to respond.

ST: What are your specific job responsibilities?

Bertrand: As manager of Turf Operations for the City of Glendale I worked out of the Department of Public Works. Along with the basic functions of turf management; mowing, fertilizing, irrigation, painting, etc. I was also assisting the Public Works maintenance operations such as street repairs, water and sewer line maintenance, maintaining the communication infrastructure, etc. It was great experience and exposure to learn how a city functions. In addition to learning many aspects of Public Works, it allowed me access to phenomenal human and capital resources. Turf maintenance tasks like loading 5 cubic yards of USGA sand into topdresser goes much quicker with a CAT 926 loader than using a John Deere 4520 tractor.

ST: What do find most enjoyable?

Bertrand: I have always found the mowing aspect of turf management the most enjoyable. I like the challenges of mowing straight lines and cool patterns. I enjoy turning the wrenches to get the mower “dialed” in and achieving a high quality of cut. But above all else, mowing gives me a couple hours each week of undisturbed, quality time with the grass. No phone calls, emails or meetings, just me and the grass. The mower can only mow the grass so fast, so there is no way to speed up or hurry the process. Sure mowing the pitch in certain directions would be faster than others, but the mower would only cut the 2 acres at 6 mph, so why rush a good thing?

ST: What task is your least favorite and why?

Bertrand: Pulling tarps would be my least favorite task of turf maintenance. Anytime you are pulling tarps, it is because something isn't working in your favor. Either the weather is turning colder and/or wetter or there is a big event upcoming which will require the turf to be at its best (and the turf is not at its best). Along the Front Range of Colorado we get decent wind gusts adding to the misery of pulling tarps.

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

Bertrand: I started as a seasonal for the City of Boulder softball complex getting adult recreational softball fields ready for play. I read an article the other day written by a job recruiter stating it's “who you know” to get a job. Not a lot has changed from 1996 when I first started; the field manager for the City of Boulder was married to my older sister's college roommate (it's six degrees of Kevin Bacon in action) and when he saw my name in the applicant pool he hired me right away. He told me I was a good hire since he “knew who I was” or at least would gripe to my older sister if I didn't pull my weight, leverage he didn't have with the other seasonal employees.

My goal when first hired as a seasonal with the City of Boulder was to get on full time with the Forestry Department. However, when a position came open for a full-time athletic field technician, I applied for and got the position. After a couple of weeks I realized I found my calling; I enjoyed the work, found it challenging and, thankfully, was decent at it too.

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

Bertrand: The single biggest challenge is to communicate to all the users the cumulative effects of their use. For example, the head coach views the turf from the perspective of 20 home games each year. The youth rugby coordinator has the perspective of 16 youth practices each season. And the marketing department is focused on five movie nights, rugby games and a handful of large special events. It is this cumulative effect of all these users on the pitch that they need a turf manager. The challenge is communicating to all parties involved how much or when they may use the turf. I feel the best way to handle this challenge is at the operations meeting when all the stakeholders and users are present, to provide them with the current condition of the turf and the forecast condition of the turf based on planned use and weather. This will give all the users and stakeholders the chance to own the decision of who, what and when to use the turf. Allowing others to get the information from you and make a decision ultimately leads to all users to have a better experience and the turf to survive (and in some cases thrive!)

ST: How do you see your job changing in the future?

Bertrand: My career and work have taken a step into a new direction this past March. The long time Director of Public Works for the City of Glendale retired in March and I am fortunate to ascend into his position. My new duties involve managing the people who maintain the infrastructure, parks, streets and maintain the regulatory compliance of City. As for my old position, Noel Harryman has taken over the helm as the Turf Manager at Infinity Park. Noel brings a tremendous work ethic and skill set to the position.

As for the job and the role of turf managers in the future, over the next decade up to 4,000 synthetic fields will be replaced. Where will cities and schools find the money to replace these surfaces? What will be the “best” methods of disposing the old surfaces? Will synthetic surfaces convert back to natural grass? Over the next decade, the questions of which type of surface is more cost effective and which surface is more environmentally sustainable will be answered. I don't think that one particular surface is the best solution to both questions. The challenge for turf managers will be to answer these difficult questions and move sports surfaces forward. ■