



Environmental management and employee safety

“WE WANT TO PUT A 5 MILLION POUND STRUCTURE ON THE BASEBALL FIELD, are you ok with that?” This is the question I was asked nearly a year and half before the event would even take place. Knowing full well this was an opportunity the Indians organization couldn’t pass up and an event that most likely no other groundskeeper would ever have the opportunity to tackle, I needed to make a few phone calls first.



Much like the setup for a Supercross event on the West Coast we felt confident about the field, but what about the weather in Indianapolis in January and February? The events were the 2012 DirecTV Celebrity Beach bowl, followed by invite-only Super Bowl party, and post-game Super Bowl party for the New England Patriots.

The best case for this event was the time we had to plan and Indians front office including the groundskeeper in all the field-related decisions. Oh and not to forget, the structure, a portable airplane hangar, would need to be trucked in through the grounds area with only a height of 11’ 4” piece by piece. When completed the structure would stand 372 feet long x 164 feet wide x 66 feet tall. Not exactly “portable.” It would take nearly 3 weeks to setup and 3 weeks to tear down for roughly 10 hours of use.

Since we knew this structure would only be setup on the outfield turf and the field would be replaced entirely, we got a head start on our renovation during the fall before the Super Bowl. Also knowing we only had about a window of 2 weeks to replace the field in the spring, the bulk of the work had to be done before the event. In the fall we sod cut, by hand, the old turf roughly 20,000 sq. ft. and donated to a local golf course. We then removed 3-4 inches of old contaminated sand and the 7-inch column of infield mix that had built up

over the 8-year lifespan of the field. Then we put all the pieces back together, 2 inches of sand, 4 inches column of infield mix, and thin cut Kentucky bluegrass sod from Tuckahoe Turf Farms, thus doing the math dropping the field an inch.

The construction was done in combination with contractors Nolan Thomas and Company and J and D Turf. The field graded to .5% slope out to our tarp drains was finished in about 3 weeks. We did the “infield” portion in the fall for a couple reasons, time frame in the spring but also to give the most wear portion of the field the most time grow-in and hopefully withstand what would be one of the hottest/driest summers of all time.

After many meetings to decide what flooring we would use as a base, we decided to go with a 6-inch road base gravel layer. This would allow for cranes, forklifts, vehicles, you name it to move in and out and turn without the risk buckling like the other flooring options. Before the gravel was in place, a layer of plastic was put down on the field, which would eliminate gravel from moving into the rootzone layer of the field. The 1,000 tons of gravel would be laser graded, watered, and compacted. And the weather issue we thought we were going to have, the guys were wearing shorts and short sleeve t-shirts throughout most of the project. With only one day of snow, couple days of rain, most of the time we had an unseasonably warm winter.

As the gravel started to settle, ¾-inch plywood was laid around the perimeter of the entire structure, which is where the concrete

would be poured. With the massive size of the structure, just over 1 million pounds of concrete would be needed as ballast. Concrete pump trucks located on the left and right field concourses with 250 foot booms pumped concrete constantly for 3 days. All contractors on site knew the importance of the field and stadium and took all precautions to make sure nothing was damaged or left behind. The grounds shop was swept 2-3x a day, no traffic allowed on fall renovation work, and plywood placed to protect outfield warning track and subgrade. The engineers on the project calculated that the weight on the field was roughly 150 lbs/per sq. ft. when the project was finished. With that in mind, we really had no reason to have concern for underground irrigation and drainage.

From there the next 2 weeks the structure skeleton was built and draped with fabric skin and end zone bleachers were built. The four-sided LED board has hung from the ceiling, VIP seating down the sidelines, and then finally 700 tons of beach sand arrived at midnight 4 days before the event. The Operations department watched the ballpark in shifts the week leading up to the Super Bowl; my shift was 5 pm to 5 am. We spent the wee hours of the morning leveling the sand, laying out the playing surface, watching the light guys play with their toys and on occasion playing golden tee or basketball on the Dan Patrick Show set.

When the event was finally underway, the main attraction a 1-hour celebrity sand football game followed by a 1-hour concert with The Fray. After the brief show the sand was covered with 4 x

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8-foot sheets of decking and transformed into a wicked night club scene with headliner Katy Perry hosted by Peyton Manning and Mark Cuban. The following night we hosted the post-game party for the New England Patriots, with acts like Earth, Wind, & Fire, LMFAO, Maroon 5, and Steven Tyler from Aerosmith. The next morning at 7 am crews were at the door to begin tear down.

Once the two 60-ton cranes had de-constructed the structure we had to remove the gravel and concrete. All 1 million pounds of concrete were broken down with a jack hammer and hauled to the recycling plant. The hardest part was removing the gravel base that was now just as hard as concrete. Using a wheel loader, skid-steer, man-power, and a sweeper the contractor, Just Pushing Dirt, had given us the field back with nearly every piece of gravel picked up and a once pristine field now smelled like a pig farm and not one part of the field was destroyed, scuffed, or out of place except the dead turf.

Getting the field back around February 25, my assistant and I tilled the outfield to a depth of about 1 inch. We then used a skid-steer and wheel loader to push the old turf and organic material into piles before contractor Nolan Thomas and his team showed up. The old turf was trucked away to an organic recycling dump site. Nolan was then able to use a GPS guided dozer and scrape off approximately 3 inches of old compacted/contaminated USGA sand. That sand was then trucked to our parking lot and donated to a parks department and picked up free of charge! HUGE SAVINGS! They would use the 2500 tons of old sand as topdressing for their fields.

Taking only about a week's time, the 300 tons (1") of USGA sand was laser graded and sodded with 1-inch-thick cut sod from Tuckahoe Turf farms. Some areas of the renovation that allowed the

Indians to save some cash: We removed the old turf and had it all in piles before contractor showed up in the spring. In the fall we removed and donated all the old turf, no dump fees. All the old sand (600 tons) instead of paying dump fees was hauled off free of charge to golf courses and parks departments. Edging of the new field was all done by the Indians grounds crew. We installed and adjusted all irrigation heads and fixed all the breaks from tilling of the new rootzone. We applied all the rootzone amendments (Endo-Roots & 16-28-12 Starter) and helped out where ever Nolan or Tuckahoe needed us.

The sod which came in dormant was installed the week of March 12 and took roughly 3 days to complete. The sod was pushed mowed the day of installation at a height of 1.25 inch and rolled with a 3-ton roller. We fertilized 3x before opening day with roughly each app at .6 lbs/N/1000 of Nature Safe 12.2.6. We also began introducing our custom blend of Kentucky bluegrass seed (Midnight Star, Bewitched, Bedazzled, and Impact) monthly starting the week of the sod installation. After the first week the reel mower was put on the sod and cut to a height of 1 inch and the baseball season was underway.

As I write this article 5 ½ months after the last piece of sod was laid and the hottest/driest summer on record, the field is performing beyond expectations. Only needing to sod the area in front of mound 1x and the Kentucky bluegrass sod has showed only little signs of wear and stress throughout the whole season (85 games). After successfully completing one of the largest events ever to take place on a baseball field, I now wonder what is in store for us next. ■

Joey Stevenson is head groundskeeper for the Indianapolis Indians.