

# F.O.Y.

Field of the Year



>> Jerad Minnick painting a logo on SoccerPlex Stadium.

# SoccerPlex Stadium, Maryland SoccerPlex, Boyds, MD

- ⊙ **Level of Submission:** Schools/Parks
- ⊙ **Category of Submission:** Soccer
- ⊙ **Head Sports Turf Manager:** Jerad Minnick
- ⊙ **Title:** Sports Field Manager
- ⊙ **Education:** Bachelor's degree in plant science/turfgrass management
- ⊙ **Work History:** I have been the Sports Turf Manager for the 22-field, 162-acre Maryland SoccerPlex since February of 2009. Previously I served as the Director of Sports Field Operations for the Kansas City Wizards and as Manager of Grounds for the Kansas City Royals.
- ⊙ **Full-time staff:** Nick Lievense (Manager), Ryan Bjorn (Assistant Manager), William Godoy (Foreman), and Joel Cruz.
- ⊙ **Other crew to recognize:** Juan Santillana, Jorge Mejia, Cristhian Mejia, and Dwight Townsend-Gray (intern).
- ⊙ **Original construction:** 2000
- ⊙ **Turfgrass variety:** 80% Kentucky bluegrass/20% poa annua
- ⊙ **Rootzone composition:** Sand mix, 85% sand, 15% organic/peat
- ⊙ **Overseeding:** Overseed with Kentucky bluegrass @ 2 lbs/ 1000 in the spring and the fall.
- ⊙ **Soil stabilizer:** TurfGrids
- ⊙ **Drainage:** Herring-bone drainage system in pea gravel under 10 inches of sand.

Biostimulant products and fertilizer make up a 68% of the materials budget. Proper biostimulant and fertilizer management is important for a strong, healthy plant. A strong, healthy plant that is durable can take heavy traffic and reduces the need for additional seed and sod. Also, the healthy plant can fight off disease with its own immune responses. That allows us to reduce our fungicide needs and costs. Additionally, healthy plants also require less water because of deep roots and less mowing because it is not growing excessively. Topdressing sand makes up an additional 28% of the materials. The use of sand is important as it protects the crown of the plant from heavy traffic.

## CHALLENGES

2011 was a year of variety and change for SoccerPlex Stadium. Maryland SoccerPlex champions itself on the ability to host a large number of events while providing high quality fields. In 2011, the number of events continued to increase exponentially.

The Freedom, Washington's Women's Professional Soccer team that called SoccerPlex home, moved operations to South Florida in 2011. Crystal Palace, a USL-1 team that played games at SoccerPlex, stopped operations entirely. Some facilities take such losses as a negative, but SoccerPlex was able to capitalize on the loss and add more events than before.

SoccerPlex still hosted a number of high-level soccer in 2011. DC United played two matches, both against other MLS teams. SoccerPlex added the ACC-Big East Challenge, an annual event that is a "tune up" to host the 2012 and 2013 ACC Conference Tournaments. Several other colleges were also able to add matches to SoccerPlex. Following Hurricane Irene and a Tropical Depression that brought over 13 inches of rain to DC in 4 days, the University of Maryland moved a rainy day match to SoccerPlex. The field at Maryland was unplayable, but SoccerPlex Stadium was ready for play.

The addition of youth matches and clinics is where SoccerPlex was able to increase its event number the most. These additional events also added the biggest challenge in to maintaining the stadium at a professional level. Youth clinics are held 2-3 hours daily on the field. Youth tournaments at the 22-field Maryland SoccerPlex were allowed to increase from 5 games per day on the Stadium to 8-10. SoccerPlex's signature tournament, Discovery Cup, hosted 24 games in 2.5 days.

Being sand based, the stadium not only benefited the University of Maryland during the fall where the area has received over 20 inches of rain. It also allowed SoccerPlex to move 84 small-sided and 30 full-sided youth matches onto the Stadium to reduce the number of rainouts from the remaining 18 native soil fields.

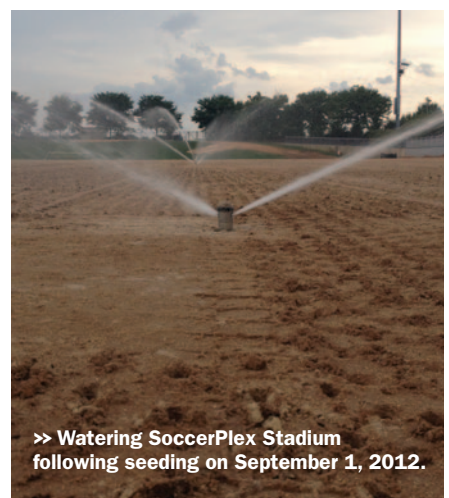
The large number of events, different type of events (youth clinics/ small-sided soccer/ full sided soccer/ professional soccer/ lacrosse, etc), and the challenge of the extremely wet fall certainly make SoccerPlex a unique field with unique challenges. Even with increased events we maintained a professional quality field in 2011.

**SportsTurf:** What are your specific job responsibilities?

**Minnick:** My job responsibilities



» Jerad Minnick mowing SoccerPlex Stadium.



» Watering SoccerPlex Stadium following seeding on September 1, 2012.

cover a wide spectrum of challenges. The “basic” piece of my position at Maryland SoccerPlex is to direct grounds maintenance and environmental management for the 22-field, 160-acre soccer park that hosts over 6,500 events per year. I also oversee many of the outdoor facility and infrastructure maintenance pieces as well. Additionally, I am responsible for the implementation of a 5-year/\$5 million field development and improvement plan that was created to meet the needs of our patrons and increase capacity and revenues.

While I am in charge of many different things, that is only possible because of the hard-working and dedicated team of people that work in supporting those tasks. All that I oversee is maintained by a core group of eight people. Ryan Bjorn is the day-to-day Grounds and Environmental Manager. Working with Ryan are two assistant managers, Julie Adamski and Dusty LeVan. Our working crew foreman is William Godoy, and our senior equipment operator is Joel Cruz. Christian Mejia and Caesar Chavez work as daily support staff members that lead other seasonal and part-time staff members that we rotate through on an as-needed basis.

I am indebted to this team for the success that we are able to achieve each and every day. I am also grateful for hard work and dedication of past managers that helped build the foundation for SoccerPlex field quality and set the stage for the FOY Award. Nick Lievense, now responsible for baseball and soccer at University of Purdue, was part of last year for the award. John Torres (head groundsman at PPL Park in Philadelphia) and Matt Carroll (now a manager with John Deere Landscapes) also were essential pieces for our team to win the FOY award.

### **SportsTurf:** What do you find most enjoyable about your job?

**Minnick:** My favorite part of my job is being able to create new methods, approaches, and ideas to maintain high traffic grass fields to a professional level. The idea that grass fields will not take heavy traffic to me is just a misconception. Every day we try new things to be able to push grass fields further and further in a transition zone climate that saw 66 days over 90 degrees 2 years ago and the coldest and wettest September and October ever last fall. And every day we find a way to succeed with better quality fields, even under increasing traffic demands. There is no doubt that my favorite part of what I do is creating the methods to change that misconception about grass fields.

### **SportsTurf:** What task is your least favorite and why?

**Minnick:** With that, there is not a part of my job that I dislike. I work hard to always think positively and in a pro-active manner. So with that, I do not think about things that I do not like.

### **SportsTurf:** How did you get started in turf management? What was your first sports turf job?

**Minnick:** Turf management started for me as a young boy mowing yards around our family farm. That venture progressed into a golf course maintenance job in high school and into my career choice in college.

My start in sports turf management came completely by chance as a sophomore golf course turf management student at the University of Missouri-Columbia. During an office visit with my professor Dr. Erik Ervin (then at Missouri), Trevor Vance of the Kansas City

Royals called Dr. Ervin to talk about the opportunity his grounds crew had for interns. As a childhood Royals fan, I jumped at the chance and I have worked in sports turf ever since.

### **SportsTurf:** What changes if any are you implementing for the winning field in 2012?

**Minnick:** In order to meet growing demand and continue to provide a high quality field surface under high traffic, SoccerPlex Stadium underwent an entire renovation the last week of August 2012, even after winning this award.

The field required the renovation because of a heavy *poa annua* infestation and a thick organic layer that had built up from an original sod layer over 12 years.

With the renovation, the field now will require less pesticide and water to maintain the *poa annua*. Additionally, the field will be able to increase on its more than 700 hours of events in 2011 with the removal of the organic layer that compacted quickly from traffic.

The renovation took place over a 5-day span during the last week of August following the ACC-Big East Challenge with European influence and support. The organic layer was removed, sand was added back to allow laser grading of the surface, the stability fiber “turf grids” were mixed in with the new sand, and the field was re-seeded with Kentucky bluegrass on September 1. It will re-open October 6, 2012 for Discovery Cup, then will play host to several DC and Maryland area fall soccer champions before hosting the ACC Men’s Championships on November 9 and 11.

Seeding, instead of sod, was chosen for 3 factors: 1) elimination of the sod-to-sand interface layer; 2) to reduce cost; and 3) reduce the environmental impact of trucking. Timing, 5 weeks, and time of the year, September, made seeding an easy decision for the field to re-open on Oct. 6, 2012.

### **SportsTurf:** How do you see the sports turf manager’s job changing in the future?

**Minnick:** The role of the Sports Turf Manager is currently in a state of positive evolution. Sports facilities are in need of additional revenue and field users are in need of higher quality playing surfaces. Sports Turf Managers are being called on to meet the demands of increased traffic with higher quality fields on a smaller budget.

These factors provide Sports Turf Managers the opportunity to reach an entirely new level of professionalism. This is the point in time that the industry gets to move past the stereotype of being just “the person that mows the grass.” This is the time that Sports Turf Managers illustrate their wide range of skills: As a soil scientist, a plant physiologist, and a chemist working with grass and fertilizers. As a personnel manager, a team builder, and a teacher working with their staffs. As a uniting leader, a communicator, and a member of the team on the field empowering coaches, athletes, and administrators.

With the demands and needs of grass fields increase every day and with new technologies, forward thinking, and creative ideas, we as Sports Turf Managers have the opportunity to increase our value and illustrate how we are extraordinary. Positive thinking and a can-do attitude will set a new level of professionalism that will equate into increased respect and appreciation from players from recreation level to professional, from executives, and from fans. What a great time to be in our industry! ■