

## Waukegan (IL) SportsPark Field #2

- ⊙ **Level of Submission:** Schools/Parks
- ⊙ **Category of Submission:** Soccer
- ⊙ **Head Sports Turf Manager:** Noel T. Brusius
- ⊙ **Title:** Parks Maintenance Worker III - Athletic Fields
- ⊙ **Education:** Bachelor's degree, GIS & Sports Turf Management, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
- ⊙ **Experience:** 1999-2004: Oshkosh Area School District: Athletic Field Maintenance Worker. 2005: St. Paul Saints, Ground Crew Intern. 2006-2007: Detroit Tigers, Ground Crew. 2008-2010: Peoria Chiefs/Bradley University, Head Groundskeeper. November 2010-Present: Waukegan Park District SportsPark Sports Turf Manager.
- ⊙ **Full-time staff:** Noel Brusius, Tony Diaz
- ⊙ **Other crew to recognize:** Steve Ems, Carlos Aguayo, Joe Ayala, Ted Holisky, Lance Moon, Billy Biang, Stan Cielez, and Taylor Carile

- ⊙ **Original construction:** 2010
- ⊙ **Turfgrass variety:** 70% Kentucky bluegrass: NuChicago, Rush, Everest, Award, Beyond; 30% perennial ryegrass: CSI, Revere GLX, Accent
- ⊙ **Overseed:** Entire field in Spring/Fall using a Seed-a-vator set at 2 lbs/1000 - 70/30 mix. Goal mouths overseeded weekly during use: in-play months: 100% Perennial Ryegrass with 50% CSI (Rhizomatic); out of play months: 70/30 Kentucky Blue Mix. Centers, sidelines, etc. overseeded as necessary; routinely after tournaments. 2012 Totals through 10/1 - (fall seeding not yet started): Seed-a-vator: 4 times (3/27, 5/21, 8/21, 9/14) = 300 lbs. Goal mouths: 18 times = 54 lbs. Other areas (centers, sidelines, etc): 19 lbs. Total overseed (through 10/1) = 373 lbs.
- ⊙ **Drainage:** Fields 2&3 were graded in pairs, in a uniform plane diagonally at a consistent 1.25% slope. The slope is from the NW corner to the SE corner.

### CHALLENGES

The overwhelming challenge in maintaining adequate turfgrass on this field is related to two very common issues that occur when a field is constructed using native soils: 1, the soil was aggressively compacted by the contractor in order to meet grading







requirements; and 2, less than desirable native topsoil was used. Soil testing has shown our soil structure is low in organic matter and high in clay content. The bottom line is ongoing compaction issues have made it extremely difficult to grow grass.

Field #2 was one of the last of the 17 SportsPark athletic fields to be grown in, yet it was expected to perform at the same level as all the other fields. Through field rotation and aggressive cultural practices, the turf conditions have been drastically improved and Field #2 is comparable to the other fields at the site.

In 2012, the district hosted three National Soccer Tournaments in addition to a variety of regional tournaments and normal league play. Some of the best amateur soccer players in the nation played on our fields. One tournament hosted 275 teams, playing from 8am-8pm daily for 7 days. To meet this rigorous tournament schedule, we had to adjust our daily maintenance to complete routine tasks. The high usage along with extreme weather conditions definitely took its toll on the turf. This summer was the warmest and third driest summer on record in Illinois. To make matters worse, not only was Field #2 challenged by the extreme drought and heat; the irrigation system was underperforming. The irrigation system manufacturer's representative was brought on site to address the problems.

Like most agencies, we face over-use and budget constraints. Our strategy is to actively and aggressively address each mainte-

nance issue as it arises. Through networking with STMA members, both local and national, we found an abundance of resources made available to us. We turned to other members who have had previous similar experiences to help us with our problematic situations. To address our soil structure issues we have consulted with some of the industry's elite and are now planning a compost topdressing program, and have been very aggressive in our cultivation practices. The use and budget issues will always be there, but through weekly meetings with our recreation department, we work together to help balance everyone's (including the field's) needs. This team approach sets us apart from the rest.

**SportsTurf:** What channels of communication do you use to reach coaches, administrators and users of your facility? Any tips on communicating well?

**Brusius:** Generally my communication to users goes through our Recreation Department (responsible for field scheduling and user groups). However this can be tricky at times because I am the only person on site for all inquiries. We schedule weekly meetings with Recreation Dept. staff, but with everyone so busy these are often cancelled or postponed. Phone calls, text messages, and emails have become our main source of communication. When we know we will be hosting tournaments or other major events, we set up conference calls with the individual user groups so we can work together to balance everyone's (including the fields') needs.



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**ST:** What are your specific job responsibilities? What do find most enjoyable? What task is your least favorite and why?

**Brusius:** I oversee/manage the maintenance and day to day operations of the 90-acre Sports Complex. This includes all turf maintenance (mowing, irrigating, fertilizing, spraying, field painting, aerating, etc), staffing, ball diamond preps, restroom cleaning/maintenance, trash/recycle duties, and all other miscellaneous tasks. In addition our SportsPark staff, led by Tony Diaz, is responsible for the 12 athletic fields located in various parks throughout the city.

I enjoy making a career out of something I really have a passion for. I enjoy working outdoors and being an integral, but mostly unnoticed, aspect to the sporting events we all take pleasure in. It is also gratifying at the end of a long week to look out at the fields and seeing the direct results of everybody's hard work. Also, I find satisfaction watching former employees and coworkers further and grow their own careers within this industry.

The SportsPark is a first-class facility and is a source of community pride. The SportsPark/athletic field maintenance staff view ourselves as leaders within the industry and we strive to be the best.

I thoroughly enjoy my job and the challenges it provides. However with multiple overlapping agendas and vastly different levels of expectations it becomes difficult to satisfy everyone at all times. My point of view is that we all have to give and take; it simply comes down to finding a happy medium.

Seasonal staffing is also challenging. Many of the guys are college age and maybe only work 3 to 4 months, then return to school in the fall. The reality is that I need a consistent seasonal staff from April through November. We are rehiring and retraining a new

group of staff members almost twice a year. This requires a time commitment to train on mowing, painting and field preps, as well as instilling an understanding of cultural practices.

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**ST:** How did you get started in turf management?

**Brusius:** While going through college I worked summers for the Oshkosh (WI) Area School District, doing ball diamond preps and general athletic field maintenance. Upon graduation I realized I really enjoyed this type of work and wanted to make a career out of it. I then went back to school to receive a turf degree. Working for and with people like Connie Rudolph, Heather Nabozny, Mike Trigg, and so many others I truly feel blessed and look ahead to "paying it forward."

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**ST:** How do you balance your work and personal time?

**Brusius:** It can be tough at times. It is probably one of the main reasons I am in my current position now working for a Park District. Having worked 6 years at the MLB and MiLB levels, I know all too well what kind of hours and stress you have to endure. Surround yourself with reliable and knowledgeable staff and take advantage of the off-season with family and friends.

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**ST:** What changes are you planning to make or have you made to your maintenance plan for 2013, if any?

**Brusius:** We've tweaked our fertilizer schedule and increased our overseed practices to help keep up with the increased use the fields are seeing. Through field rotation and aggressive cultural practices, the turf conditions have improved throughout the entire site. I am hopeful to address our topdressing/soil amendment needs by fall. My strategy has always been to actively and aggressively address each maintenance issue as it arises.

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**ST:** Are you yet involved in "sustainable" management practices? If so, what are you doing?

**Brusius:** Environmental sustainability was taken into consideration at every opportunity during the planning process of the SportsPark. To manage storm water, bioswales were incorporated into the parking areas. Water from the retention pond is recycled for use in the irrigation system. A rain garden catches storm water from the maintenance facility. An additional green initiative was planting of the 16-acre perimeter of the park with native prairie plantings and seed mix creating a no-mow zone. We also have instituted a co-mingled recycling collection throughout the season. I run the irrigation system using ET rates and we will budget for soil sensors to further enhance water usage when they become compatible with our central controller.

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

**Brusius:** I believe Jerad Minnick from the Maryland SoccerPlex said it best: "No longer are we just the people that mow the grass. This is the time that Sports Turf Managers illustrate their wide range of skills: as soil scientists, plant physiologists, and chemists working with grass and fertilizers; as personnel managers, team builders, and teachers working with their staffs; as a uniting leader, a communicator, and a member of the team on the field empowering coaches, athletes, and administrators." ■





# Gordon Field, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY

▼ Anne Beckingham's chocolate lab, Bazyl, is part of the staff, chasing geese off the fields and serving Vassar in many ways, Anne says.







- ◎ **Level of Submission:** College
- ◎ **Category of Submission:** Soccer
- ◎ **Head Sports Turf Manager:** Anne R. Beckingham
- ◎ **Title:** Athletic Fields Supervisor
- ◎ **Education:** Bachelor's degree in Business/Golf Course Supt.
- ◎ **Experience:** Buffalo Bisons internship, 2006; Altoona Curve internship, 2007; Vassar College, 2008 to present
- ◎ **Other crew to recognize:** Brian Harnen, Josh Wyatt & Jonas Narvarro
- ◎ **Original construction:** 2006
- ◎ **Turfgrass variety:** Tuckahoe Kentucky bluegrass with Lofts Supreme Sportsmix/Matrix Fairway Mix in the goal mouths and bench area.
- ◎ **Overseed:** We overseed CONSTANTLY in the fall. We use a Loft's sports turf mix - KBG and PR in the goals and bench areas. We do this approx 5-7 times per soccer season - usually before a men's game. We solid tine these areas, overseed and then topdress with USGA sand. We also overseed the entire field after core aeration in late October. This year we are going to solid tine (3/4") two directions and then slit seed with our Landpride.
- ◎ **Rootzone:** 100% sand, with soil amendments including Bolster, Keyplex, Respond III wetting agent, Holganix 38 Special.
- ◎ **Drainage:** Multiflow Flatpipe which drains into an 8" trunkline around the perimeter of the field and drains into a cistern located next to the field.



## CHALLENGES

**SportsTurf:** What channels of communication do you use to reach coaches, administrators and users of your facility? Any tips on communicating well?

**Beckingham:** Our channels of communication are casual. Normally our coaches either e-mail or give a call to my office or cell phone. If I see them on their fields (and they aren't busy) I like to just say a quick hello and make sure

they're set for games or practices. We have a great working relationship with our assistant athletic director as well as our facilities director. They are always in contact about field use, weather, schedules etc. They understand my concerns about all of our fields and are so helpful in decision making—always trying to do what's best for our facility. We've come a long way as far as getting on the same page regarding field guidelines and



I trust their judgments as far as making good decisions for field use.

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**ST:** What are your specific job responsibilities? What do find most enjoyable? What task is your least favorite and why?

**Beckingham:** I'm the Athletic Fields Supervisor. I'm responsible for organizing the maintenance of all aspects of our fields and tennis courts. I manage fertilization, pesticide applications, mowing, trimming—all things that have to do with field maintenance on a daily basis. We are also responsible for three areas on campus that house students and faculty, what we call "outside properties." We are responsible for mowing and maintaining these areas as well. I'm also considered a working supervisor. In my initial job interview I really stressed that I wanted to be able to work right along with my staff and so that's what I do! We make a good team that's for sure.

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

**Beckingham:** My "real" home is in the Adirondack Mountains—Old Forge, NY. Strictly a tourist area, there wasn't much in the way in employment that didn't have to do with tourism. I was a greenskeeper at our local 18-hole golf course for 14 years. I realized that there would be no advancement for me at this course so I decided to apply to the State University of NY-Delhi. My degree is a bachelor's in business/golf course superintendent. Summer semester requirements were to work as an intern in the turfgrass industry. I was so fortunate to be able to work for two minor league baseball teams for two of my internships and then I was hooked on sports turf management!

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**ST:** How do you balance your work and personal time?

**Beckingham:** My husband, Pete, and I will be married 35 years this September. He is the most forward thinking, accepting man I know. And, he's my best friend. He lets me live my life and has always encouraged me to reach any goal that I've set for myself. We live a little over 3 hours away from each other. We try to see each other about every other weekend or so (depending on what season it is) and really look forward to wintertime when the fields are put away. We've learned to appreciate each other so much more, mostly because of distance and time restraints. We just make time and try to figure it out! While it has been good for

both of us to be independent, it has also strengthened our relationship. And, I've gotten to see Pete grow in his independence and I know he has definitely seen me grow in mine. I must say, though, that I do miss him.

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**ST:** What changes are you planning to make or have you made to your maintenance plan for 2013, if any?

**Beckingham:** In the immortal words of Brian Harnan (best bud, co-worker, staff member, and person from whom I have deleted a LOT of files from his head), "Anne, if it's not broken, then don't fix it." Yes, we may tweak our program, experiment with new products etc., but for the most part we're happy with our results. Our aim is to make the best fields for our athletes and coaches. When we get good reviews from them, it means a lot to us and that we've done our job.

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**ST:** Are you yet involved in "sustainable" management practices? If so, what are you doing?

**Beckingham:** I really like to experiment with new products especially ones that might reduce chemical inputs into the soil. This past year I had the opportunity to work with Dr. Rossi, Dr. Fefer and Brady Nash. We tried different application rates of a product called Civitas (mainly a golf course product and not registered for sports field usage yet in New York State). I kept in touch with a few of my golf course supers to see how they were using it and how it performed on their courses. It turned out to be a wonderful product as far as water use—it cut irrigation use almost in half on one of the fields. I also tried different fungicide and fertilizer applications rates throughout the summer and saw some good results with product reduction too. We are willing to try any product that will encourage sustainability, and like to be able to share information with our schools in NYS through seminars. Since there is a "no pesticide law" in effect for our schools, any product that would be helpful to them through our experimentation is a bonus.

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

**Beckingham:** I would like to have things remain the same. My staff does a great job and we take great pride in our fields. We would love to have an NCAA game on ANY of our fields. Our men's soccer team had a great year last year so we're pretty hopeful for all of our teams. However, if there was an MLB groundskeeper looking for a good assistant . . . :D ■

