

## 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 Carlile
- ⊙ **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." ■

