

# F.O.Y.

Field of the Year



► PRE-GAME Prep

## Tiger Park, Louisiana State University

- Level of Submission: College
- Category of Submission: Softball
- Head Sports Turf Manager: Eric Harshman (now with University of Kentucky)
- Title: Assistant Sports Turf Manager
- Education: Bachelor's Degree in Marketing
- Experience: Started off in the golf industry in 2005. In 2007 started working

for the Louisville Bats. Spent one season on the game day staff, one season as seasonal full-time and two seasons as first assistant. In June, 2011 moved to Baton Rouge and became the assistant sports turf manager at LSU.

- Full-time staff: Matt Mitchusson, Caleb Hatcher
- Other crew to recognize: Paul Wedig, Jake Wilson

- Original construction: 2009
- Turfgrass variety: Celebration bermudagrass
- Overseed: Perennial Ryegrass is applied to the playing field and grassed seating area beyond the outfield wall in late October at a rate of 14 lbs/1000.
- Drainage: Herringbone drainage system, 4" drain line, 15' off center.



## CHALLENGES

Saying that Tiger Park is overused is an understatement. From September 2011 to July 2012, 56 games were played at Tiger Park. Our fall season consisted of 12 games in the month of October. Because we reside in southeast Louisiana we have the luxury of living in a warmer climate and because of that, our season starts a bit earlier than most. Practices start in January just like everyone else, but we are hosting tournaments starting the first weekend in February. Tiger Park and LSU hosted three separate tournaments this past season that consisted of 22 games. Sixteen of those were non-LSU softball games; 24 home LSU games were played at Tiger Park and 40 games total for the 2012 season. Just as the season came to an end in early June, it was time for softball camps to begin. Three separate camps took place at Tiger Park. Each camp had in average of 116 participants. LSU's head softball coach, Beth Torina, is also the coach for the USSSA Florida Pride of the National Pro Fastpitch league. A four-game series was played between the Carolina Diamonds and the USSSA Pride in early July which brought some great exposure to LSU and Tiger Park. We got a short, and much needed break in the month of August, just to have fall softball start up again in September to repeat the process.

We are very fortunate that our softball team helps with the tarping of the field. Our grounds staff and the softball coaching staff have been able to work out a system that benefits everyone. The team is responsible for tarping the field after practice if needed and they help our staff during games. In the morning and during the day all tarp duties fall on the grounds staff. At last count the grounds staff had the team outnumbered in tarp pulls with 13 to their measly five tarp pulls. I joke, but again I am very fortunate to have the help from the team with this. Though we had the team out numbered in tarp pulls, those five times saved our staff some major headaches.

In 2012 the entire coaching staff entered their first season at LSU. With new coaches means learning their expectations and gaining their trust. There is a fine line of balancing the needs of the team with the needs of the facility. I make it a point to stop by their offices regularly and see how everything's going and letting them know that if they need anything to not hesitate, but ask. This has helped build a working relationship with the coaching staff. Teamwork was the key to success in 2012.

**SportsTurf:** What attracted you to a career in sports turf management?

**Harshman:** The appeal of being around sports every day and working outside.

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

**Harshman:** I managed and maintained the day-to-day operations at both the LSU Soccer Complex and Tiger Park. I scheduled maintenance programs for the playing fields and landscape, and managed and instructed crews on game and non-game days and kept an open line of communication with coaching staffs/liaisons, marketing, and game management personnel regularly.

When not at Soccer/Softball I would assist where needed, for example.

- Tiger Stadium (Football) - Paint end zones/game prep and assist in maintenance program



### ▲ MID-SEASON

- Alex Box (Baseball) – Game prep, assist in maintenance program
- Practice Football Facility – (3 natural grass fields) (1 synthetic outdoor field) (Indoor facility) Assist in maintenance program
- Helped maintain two High School fields (Baseball, Football/Soccer)
- Track & Field – Paint sector lines for shot, discus & javelin. Make necessary repairs to throws field (patch divots, irrigation breaks)
- Concert and event prep

**Most Enjoyable:** I really enjoy opening day (for any sport) The nervous excitement sets in and you have that moment of satisfaction, knowing that all the hours the crew and I put into getting the field ready has paid off.

**Least Enjoyable:** Inclement weather and living and dying by weather sources. I use multiple weather sources via the internet and more often than not none of them are accurate. Percentages are different, radar maps are different. I try to go with my gut instincts and learning the weather patterns has been very beneficial.

**ST:** What was your first sports turf job?

**Harshman:** After spending several years working in the golf industry I made the transition into sports turf working with the Louisville Bats and head groundskeeper, Tom Nielsen. I spent four seasons in Louisville starting off as game day help, to a full time seasonal position and finally as the first assistant for two seasons. After leaving Louisville I have been blessed with the opportunities to work at both Louisiana State University & the University of Kentucky, serv-



▲ PAINTING the Tiger Eye - Done twice a week during the season

ing as the assistant sports turf manager working with CSFMs Eric Fasbender and Marcus Dean.

**ST:** What advice would you offer when relocating to begin a new Turf Management job, both personally and professionally?

**Harshman:** Personally: If married/family, make sure to talk out any detail imaginable. Be considerate of your spouse and family. Make sure everyone is on board. The decision you make will not only have an impact on you, it will impact your family!

Professionally: First and foremost, look to challenge yourself and broaden your horizons. Be confident in your abilities, but look toward others when advice is needed. Know that mistakes are going to be made and that you can learn from them. Relocating can be exciting and can be very stressful if you allow it to consume you. Control the controllable!

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

**Harshman:** I use a wide variety of communication methods (e-mail, phone calls, texts). I find that the best way of communication is in person and to the individual/individuals looking for answers. By going straight to the source you eliminate any concerns/questions that may be lost in translation via texts or even with e-mail.

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

**Harshman:** The sports turf managers job is ever-changing. Cultural practices and the means to apply them change at a rapid rate. Doing research on the latest products (equipment, fertilizers etc.) is a



▲ PRE-GAME Water

constant. I believe that turf managers are now being asked to do more than manage the playing surfaces. We are now taking on the responsibilities of facility director, stadium operations and event managers. ■

▼ TIGER INVITATIONAL Eight game weekend tournament

