



# Tips on tarps

## **BROCK PHIPPS, Springfield Cardinals**

I'm sure with a lot of minor league teams when it comes to dealing with the tarp, safety has to be the biggest priority. I always try to stress to our new employees how to handle the tarp with care yet respect what can happen in severe weather conditions. We have all been in that situation when the wind takes control and it's either protecting the field or protecting someone from getting hurt. I let my staff know that if you don't feel in control and your feet is coming off the ground it's probably time to let go.

At Hammons Field we have both the Missouri State Bears and the Springfield Cardinals using the facility. When the Bears are playing I use their players to cover the field with the tarp. On game day it's my staff, which consists of 6-7 members, along with the players and coaching staff. To pull the tarp during the Cardinals season, I use my staff along with the office staff. Communication is the key when dealing with both teams. When rain is approaching I will send out a text message or email just to let them know they will be needed. I have found that it's helpful to send out a notice before the season to all staff to have extra clothes on hand. There is nothing like working in the office with soggy clothes all day. Another key is to have the office staff stagger their lunch schedule; it's not a good feeling when bodies are needed and no one is around.

With minimal staff in the minor leagues one of the first things I ever did was to roll a rope into the tarp. Talk about saving time and some energy—when it's crunch time to place the tarp on the field during the game. To roll the tarp out we simply hook on with our utility vehicle and proceed to roll the tarp out. The tarp is positioned on the right field warning track. I like to have the tube positioned on the wall that when the tarp is rolled out it's one fold and go. This also enables half of the skin to be covered from the first fold. It's very important to pull the tarp with the seams.

Here at Hammons Field we have four tarp drains in shallow right field. This enables us to remove a lot of water in a short amount of time. It's always nice to have a little breeze in the right direction when it's time to remove the water. The air movement under the tarp makes it like adding 10 staff members to the tarp crew. After dumping the tarp in right field we then pull back across the infield and begin the folding process. We fold the tarp twice and then roll it up. It's very important to keep all the seams and

>> **Above: PULLING THE TARP AT HAMMONS FIELD**, home to the Missouri State Bears and Springfield Cardinals, maintained by Brock Phipps.

>> **Below: A SHELF CLOUD** looms over Hammond Field in Springfield, Missouri.



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edges straight to enable the next pull to go smoothly.

If we expect high wind I make sure the tarp is pulled tight in every direction. We surround the tarp and pull in every direction to accomplish this. Metal stakes anchor the tarp down and then equipment is placed on the four corners. I found that using stakes is the best and easiest way to anchor the tarp. Sand bags seem to drag along on the top of the tarp when wind begins to pick up and they are time consuming to put in place. If no wind is expected we then place two carpet drying fans on the first and third base side of the tarp and inflate the bottom side to the tarp. This has really helped with two problems: the first is this allows air movement and cuts down on disease; the other is it will help to shed some water off of the tarp. It's amazing what these can do with the short amount of time it takes to set them in place. Take care of your tarp and it will definitely save you time and labor when used correctly.

### **COREY RUSSELL, Myrtle Beach Pelicans**

Last year in Myrtle Beach we had a total of 55 tarp pulls. These were either overnight, in game, during the day, etc. We only had to pull twice in-game for a short delay. For those in-game pulls we try to aim for 60-90 seconds to get the field covered and then worry about getting it bagged down.

Here at the beach with the coastal weather, we see a lot of our wet conditions as pop up thunderstorms off the water between 2 pm and 6 pm. So a lot of our concerns are whether or not to cancel batting practice and trying to get as much of our pre-game routine done before the tarp goes on if it looks like it we won't be able to get it off until closer to game time. We've put it out with 6 people and that is the BARE minimum. About 10 are what we shoot for. We actually had some bad rips in our tarp, some that got to be more than 100 feet long by the end of the



>> **COREY RUSSELL** leads his crew in repairing a torn tarp last summer in Myrtle Beach.

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>> WITH ANOTHER COASTAL STORM CLEARED, fans at a Myrtle Beach Pelicans game are treated to a rainbow.

season. This led to us going and retrieving the local high school's tarp for the last two home stands of the year.

I think the best way to handle your tarp is to just try and convey what you're trying to do to everyone as loudly and early as possible. The fewer people trying to lead the better. Usually my assistant and I are on each end of the tarp and we're the only ones giving out directions. No matter how many times you do it however, someone always forgets what the routine is, which is the downfall of not having an actual "tarp crew." It's everyone on deck here from the GM to the front office interns.

**JOEY STEVENSON,**  
**Indianapolis Indians**

To get it on in a timely manner, at the least we need 8-10 people, but when all front office interns are able to make it

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>> **VICTORY FIELD**, home to the Indianapolis Indians, maintained by Joey Stevenson

down we have approximately 17-20. At full-tilt, I believe one of our best tarp times was 1 minute, 7 seconds. On average we are probably right around 90 seconds. We use 140 foot straps rolled up in the tarp, pulled by two people, with the remaining people pushing tarp. It really helps get the tarp off the wall and you don't have to "flip" the end of the tarp over the tube on the rollout. The BEST way to get the tarp out we found, is to tell the crew work hard for 90 seconds and then the pain is over! During non-game tarp pulls, we use a Gator to pull the tarp, which helps keep the crew fresh.

**OPIE CHEEK,**  
**Clearwater Threshers**

With our office staff and crew we have 12 people who can help with our tarp and we can get it on the field in 2 minutes. If there is water on the tarp, we just get a run-

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» **BRIGHT HOUSE FIELD**, home to the Clearwater Threshers, maintained by Opie Cheek.

ning start on pulling off the tarp, which gets the water moving and we dump it in the outfield. Then we put it back on the infield before folding it up.

**KEITH WINTER,**  
**Fort Wayne Tincaps**

Game day management—when in doubt, pull it! Compile the best and most trusted weather information you have at

your disposal, then trust your instincts. The longer you are in this business, the more you learn that your instincts are one of your greatest assets. On game days, when hundreds of thousands of dollars may be at stake, it is always better to be safe than sorry. The worst thing that can happen is you take a dry tarp off a field if it doesn't rain. Also, as you get closer to game time, be prepared! If BP is going on, talk to both teams about your tarp pull contingency plan so the field can be cleared as quickly as possible. Minutes equal dollars when it comes to protecting a game-day field.

We wrap a rope in our tarp and pull out the roll with a utility vehicle. This is faster than pushing the roll out by hand and doesn't necessitate having to get people in place to push. Once the tarp is rolled out, we can get it in position with 6-8 strong armed bodies, but I prefer 12-15 so that placement is perfect and time is saved. Our record from pull out to placement is about 90 seconds for an in-game pull.

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**OTHER TARP MANAGEMENT IDEAS FROM KEITH WINTER**

We inflate our tarp EVERYTIME with two large fans to keep air circulating under the tarp. Not only is this a turf disease prevention step, but the water also runs off the inflated tarp to the edges, making it quicker and easier to get the tarp back off the field. When the rain stops, we move excess water off with roller squeegees, and in most cases, don't have to take the time and drag all that infield conditioner

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» PARKVIEW FIELD, home to the Fort Wayne Tincaps, maintained by Keith Winter

around by draining the tarp in another direction.

When we take the tarp off the field, I try to have enough front office personnel on hand to “hold up” the opposite side to keep from dragging so much conditioner off the baselines and skin. There will always be some piles after the fold, but lifting the folded edge helps. When rolling the tarp back on the roll, we have a narrow window in the visitor’s bullpen to place the tarp, so I make sure myself or one of my grounds crew is “aligning” the roll. A “bad roll” isn’t worth hurrying, because you know it always has to come back out again.

Finally, if you are inflating the tarp and the weather is threatening, make sure it is ultra-secure. We have foot-long tarp stakes at every grommet and put a piece of equipment on three corners. In the center field corner, we roll the tarp up in the roll almost to the edge of the skin, because I like Mother Nature to water as much grass as possible. ■

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