

Panther Stadium, Oregon School District (WI)

CHALLENGES

As the only groundskeeper for the Oregon School District, my biggest challenge has been that I do not have a degree in Turf Management. Despite this, I have a relentless passion, dedication and drive and I believe that has helped me to be the best turf manager I can be. I grew up on a farm and I've had experience working on a golf course but the majority of what I've learned came "on the job." I take notes of everything I do; I take before and after pictures and most importantly, I never settle for "good enough," I am always striving for improvement. At the end of every season, I go over my notes to find out what worked and what didn't work. I am in a

unique situation because all of the improvements to the field and around the stadium have come because of my hard work and dedication.

My first goal for improvement was to relieve compaction and limit unnecessary activity on the field. To relieve compaction, a drill-n-fill using Turface was performed in 2004 and again in 2009. I also aerate the field 8-10 times a year on average, recently switching the plugs from 3/4 inch to 1/2 inch which helps the holes repair faster and makes them less noticeable during the athletic season. If rain is expected before a football game, I spread Turface across the field. This helps to absorb moisture and stabilize the field for a safer playing surface. I also



- Level of Submission: Schools/Parks
- Category of Submission: Football
- Head Sports Turf Manager: Ron Novinska
- Title: Groundskeeper
- Education: High school plus turf continuing education
- Experience: I have learned everything on the job. I completed two UW Madison Turf Management Short courses. I also completed the University of Georgia's Turf Management online course. I belong to the STMA and WSTMA. I'm currently the Vice-President for the Wisconsin STMA chapter and was previously the treasurer.
- Full-time staff: Ron Novinska
- Other crew to recognize: Dan Prah, Josh Graber, and Mike Piper
- Original construction: 1966
- Turfgrass variety: Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass
- Overseed: I oversee from May to October. I broadcast seed before an event so the players "cleat" in the seed. I pre-germinate the seed as much as I can. I slit seed in June after aerating, then drag plugs to break them up and cover the seed. I create a divot mix that consists of pre-germinated seed, topsoil and Turface. I then walk the field, loosen any bare spots, add divot mix and cover with Pam 12.

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slice, especially if rain is expected before an event to help drain the field faster.

Poa annua has been an issue for me for quite a few years. A few years ago, I tried something new. I cut out the larger spots and put in new sod. I did this to help lessen the amount of seed that would get spread around, avoid injury to players from the turf giving way and avoid divots. Irrigation was another challenge that I didn't realize until last year. In June of 2010, in-ground irrigation was installed. Prior to the in-ground system, I watered with Kifco water wheels. I'm able to do light watering when I'm overseeding and water in extreme heat to "cool" down the turf.

My future challenges include trying to fix the field's crown. Since I don't see this being done in the near future, I will try to fix it myself. To do this I will need to sod cut areas, roll back the sod and either raise or lower the dirt. The crown is not terrible, but there are some spots that need fixing.

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

Novinska: First, I would like to say that I have tremendous support from the administrators and coaches and that is due, mostly in part, to our open lines of communication. I've had the opportunity to get feedback and suggestions from them and they've grown to trust my ideas and opinions. It's a win/win situation.

Whether it is an email, text, phone call or face to face meeting, there is always daily contact. My tip would be to build a good rapport with the people you are working for by being visible, available and responsive. These three things will help you earn their trust, respect and a better understanding of what it takes to do your job

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

Novinska: What I find most enjoyable about my job is EVERYTHING! There is a great deal of satisfaction that comes from working all year to get the stadium field in the best shape possible. I take a lot of pride in what I do and as the only groundskeeper for the district I also feel a great deal of responsibility to make our fields the safest they can be.

I'm responsible for all aspects of turf maintenance for the high school athletic fields, but I am also a resource for landscaping and grounds care at all of the other district facilities. This includes mowing, fertilizing, painting, weed control and equipment maintenance. I also set up the fields for games, maintain turf and athletic equipment, and keep records of daily work, tree trimming and snow removal.

My least favorite task is not having enough time. Trying to get all the work done in a 40-hour work week is difficult and can be a little stressful, but I've learned to allow myself not to get completely caught up in it; it's true that it is a never-ending job, but if I look at it that way it becomes a burden.



ST: How did you get started in turf management?

Novinska: I started in turf management without really realizing it. I was the district delivery/mail driver at the time. During the summer months, there would be a few slow days, so I asked if I could fix up some fields. This also helped the custodians, who at the time were taking care of the fields along with the interior of the building. So I started to fix up the high school's two baseball fields by removing lips as well as edging. The district soon recognized that this was important and created the groundskeeper's position in the fall of 2003. My only prior experience in turf management was working at my uncle's golf course for a couple of summers. I learned landscaping, weed trimming and topdressing the greens from him and the rest I taught myself by reading as much as I could, attending turf seminars and field days and completing two online certificate courses through the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Georgia.

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

Novinska: Balancing work and personal time has been good, and being in the K-12 level, isn't as big an issue because I only work 40 hours a week, a bit more during peak seasons. My family is very supportive.

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

Novinska: I haven't made any major changes in 2013. I have been researching topdressing the stadium field with compost. There may be a small window of opportunity to do this yet this fall, but if not, I will try next year.

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

Novinska: I'm becoming a little more involved in sustainable management. I soil test every year and have adjusted my fertilizer program because of the high rate of P and K, so over the past few years, I have only applied nitrogen. I'm looking into compost, and organic fertilizers. Installation of an irrigation system has helped me to manage water use. An irrigation system will be installed this fall on the practice football fields. This will help with water conservation by not having to occasionally water during the day.

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

Novinska: I see my job changing by the use of technology. Technology is playing a bigger part in the turf industry, with seed genetics to grow lights to even moisture testers, and it is constantly changing. Being the only groundskeeper, I need to find all the tools I can to help me get the job done. ■

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