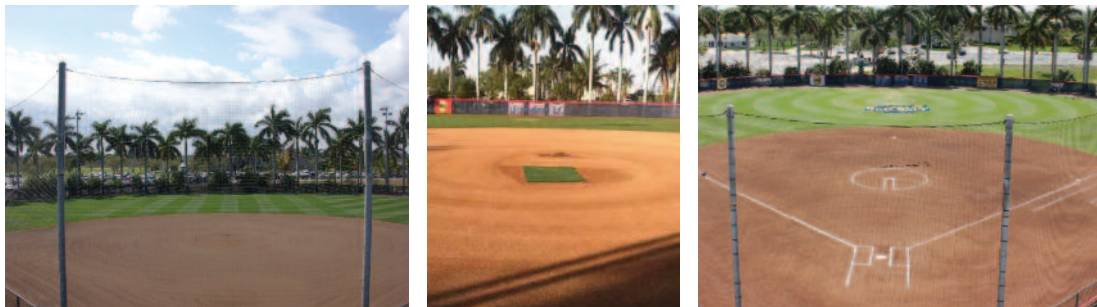


# FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY Softball Stadium

Boca Raton, FL

Located in south Florida, FAU is a premier location to host collegiate invitational tournaments including the 2012 Sunbelt Conference Championship tournament and upcoming 2014 Conference USA Championship tournament. With our conference games, invitational tournaments, fall softball games and fall Lady Gator Softball Tournament the field hosts 80-100 games a year. In addition to FAU daily practices, the field is also used for two winter softball camps and as a practice facility for the Phoenix travel softball team.



- ⦿ **Level of Submission:** College
- ⦿ **Category of Submission:** Softball
- ⦿ **Head Sports Turf Manager:** Ken Czerniak
- ⦿ **Title:** Sports Turf Manager
- ⦿ **Education:** High School
- ⦿ **Experience:** Worked 10 years at the Texas Rangers spring training facility in Port Charlotte, FL

starting as a laborer and working to the assistant field supervisor. In 2003 became the head sports turf manager for sports field management taking over the supervision of 30 acres at Florida Atlantic University.

- ⦿ **Full-time staff:** Phillip Bathalon, Casey Myers, and Micah Bennett

- ⦿ **Original construction:** 1999
- ⦿ **Turfgrass variety:** Celebration bermudagrass
- ⦿ **Overseed:** Double Eagle Blend perennial ryegrass seeded at 7 pounds per thousand with an extra 200 pounds to spot seed position spots and sidelines during the months of January and February.

#### WHY STMA SHOULD CONSIDER YOUR FIELD A WINNER?

This softball field is home of the Florida Atlantic University (FAU) Owls and maintained by sports field management with a crew of four. Spring at FAU is a challenge with competing schedules of NCAA Division I baseball and softball programs. Located in south Florida, FAU is a premier location

to host collegiate invitational tournaments including the 2012 Sunbelt Conference Championship tournament and upcoming 2014 Conference USA Championship tournament. With our conference games, invitational tournaments, fall softball games and fall Lady Gator Softball Tournament the field hosts 80-100 games a year. In addition to FAU daily practices, the field is also used for two winter softball camps and as a practice facility for the Phoenix travel softball team.

Before the 2013 season, the infield was considered hard and caused balls to bounce high. The hard infield was a result of brick dust topdressing as it



## FAU Softball Stadium

tends to not hold water. A softer infield was wanted to produce more ground balls. FAU coaches and administrators verbalized their concerns regarding the infield including the poor drainage associated with it. However to produce immediate results the field would have to be renovated, a project the budget could not support. Maintenance to minimize this problem involved multiple daily watering that became very inefficient for the crew. This year our crew made a positive impact as our challenge was to address this long-standing issue.

In order to mitigate the hard infield we softened the home plate area out to where ground balls would be hit. Our strategy was to add quick dry as it retains moisture, thereby creating the desired softer surface. Once the quick dry was incorporated we were able to dramatically shorten our watering regime.

A result of hosting 79 games in two months is that position spots become a real concern. Multiple strategies were incorporated from the previous year to minimize damage done to these spots. Specifically we raised our height of cut and stretched out mowing days to keep the grass blade longer. We also aerified the field twice during the season to control compaction.

Our crew was able to take a problematic hard infield and with creative practices make a softer infield that was better for the coaches and players. With unpredictable weather we were able to maintain a quality safe playable field throughout the season.

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

**Czerniak:** I believe face to face is the best way to communicate, but most of the time communication is done by email or by phone. I try to speak with coaches and administrators on a weekly basis to see if anything has deviated from the previously provided schedules. My assistants speak to the coaches daily just to touch base. The tip I would give is to talk to every coach and listen to their concerns and ask them if there is anything you can do to benefit them and help make things better.

**ST:** What are your specific responsibilities?

**Czerniak:** As the Sports Turf Manager at FAU for Sports Field Management, my responsibilities include maintaining 29 acres of bermudagrass, one synthetic field, and overseeing the day to day operations of all our fields. The operations include but are not limited to the mowing schedules, painting schedules and fertilization program. The scheduling helps provide direction to my five employees (Phil Bathalon, Casey Myers, Micah Bennett, Tyler Cornish, and Danny Bradley), and allow us to complete our work at a professional level.

**ST:** What tasks do you find most enjoyable?

**Czerniak:** Creating and mowing patterns is most enjoyable to me. While burning patterns in for periods of time helps with the aesthetics, I also rotate my patterns. Rotating patterns prevents ruts from the mower which helps with both safety and playability.

### Equipment List

- Toro Reel Master 5510
- Graco Line Lazer 3400
- McLane (edger)
- Kubota M5040 (tractor)
- Wiedenmann Super 500 (vertical mowing machine)
- Toro ProCore 864
- Toro Workman HD
- Toro GreensMaster 3100 with vertical mowing reels
- Kubota LA211 (front end loader)
- John Deere 1200A (infield drag)
- Stihl BR550 (blower)
- Tycrop (topdresser)
- Toro Low Profile 175 (spray rig)
- GreensGroomer (turf brush)
- Lesco backpack sprayer
- Scotts Turf Builder Classic (drop spreader)
- Lesco Commercial Plus (rotary spreader)
- GEHL 6635 SXT (front end loader)
- Volvo DD14 (5 ton roller - rental)
- Ryan (sod cutter)

**ST:** What task is your least favorite and why?

**Czerniak:** My least favorite task has to be pulling the tarp for softball and baseball and then getting the field back in a safe and playable condition. Our small staff at games makes these situations more stressful and challenging. Due to the heavy rains in south Florida, we have our fair share of downpours throughout the year.

**ST:** How did you get your start in turf management? What was your first job?

**Czerniak:** My father was a golf course superintendent and my love for baseball influenced me toward this career. I was lucky to have a spring training home in Port Charlotte with the Texas Rangers. One day I was playing golf with Tom Burns and Tom Vida, the

sports turf managers with the Rangers, and asked if they needed help. I started as a laborer in 1993 and worked my way up to assistant sports turf manager in 2000. I was very lucky to have them both take me under their wing and share their knowledge and past experiences. They both helped shape me into who I am today. I started at FAU in 2004 and I'm still here today.

**ST:** What practices do you use to keep your infield skin in peak condition?

**Czerniak:** Our practices include nail dragging, dragging, and watering. We also re-level position spots and the lead off areas around the bases with infield clay. On a regular basis, we assess our conditioner coverage and correct it if needed by adding or removing material. We are consistently maintaining the pitching circle and home plate area to achieve our professional standard.

**ST:** What changes if any are you considering or implementing for the winning field in 2014?

**Czerniak:** We are continuing the strategy started last year of incorporating calcined clay by recycling the clay from our recent baseball field renovation. We will be raising our bullpens and laser grading our infield to prevent runoff water from sitting in those areas. We will also move four heads to help get better coverage over the entire field. We will be putting up barriers along parts of our warning track to prevent any material from washing away.

**ST:** How do you see the Sports Turf Manager's job changing in the future?

**Czerniak:** With an increase in pesticide and fertilization application laws, there will be more training required to apply such products. Also, as our field usage and the number of events increase each year, cultural practices and time management will become much more important. ■