

MILTON HERSHEY SCHOOL (PA)

Middle Division Football Field



■ **Category of Submission:** Schools/Parks Football

■ **Sports Turf Manager:** Jason Bowers, CSFM, and Joe Barr

Editor's note: Jason Bowers is now with Virginia Tech University. Some of the information below refers to him.

■ **Title:** Athletic Field Technician

■ **Education:** Associate's degree in turf and landscaping

■ **Experience:** With my associates in Landscape and Turf Management from Virginia Tech, I was the Sports Turf Manager at Tech from 2004-2009. I received my CSFM in 2007

and won the STMA College Football Field of the Year award in 2008. In 2010, I became the Sports Turf Manager at the new Philadelphia Union Major League Soccer stadium in Philadelphia, PA. Then in 2011, I started work at the Milton Hershey School in Hershey, PA at the Catherine Hall middle division athletic facilities.

Joe Barr assisted with the outdoor athletic fields for 7 years at the Milton Hershey School before I became the Athletic Field Technician and his supervisor. It was my intention to groom Joe to eventually take over as the head Athletic Field Technician for the MHS Catherine Hall facilities. I mentored Joe and

taught him how to calibrate spraying equipment and fertilizing equipment and tried to help him understand new and easier layout plans and paint designs.

■ **Full-time staff:** Jason Bowers, CSFM, Joe Barr, and Caleb Nippert

■ **Original construction:** 2008

■ **Rootzone:** Native soil

■ **Turfgrass variety:** Turf-type tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, and some perennial ryegrass

■ **Overseed:** Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass mix (90% to 10%, respectively)

■ **Drainage:** Herringbone pattern

About Milton Hershey School

Milton Hershey School is a cost-free, private, coeducational home and school for children from families of low income. The school is funded by a trust established by Milton S. Hershey and his wife Catherine. Milton Hershey School offers a positive, structured home life year-round and an excellent pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade education. Our vision focuses on building character and providing children with the skills necessary to be successful in all aspects of life.

WHY STMA SHOULD CONSIDER YOUR FIELD A WINNER?

The Milton Hershey School (MHS) was founded in 1909 as a school and home for orphaned boys. Today the MHS provides a cost-free, private, coeducational school and home for children from low income families and those with social need.

Catherine Hall is the middle division of the school, grades 5 through 8. In 2005 the Catherine Hall football field was constructed, outfitted with irrigation, a herring bone drainage system, and seeded with a tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass mix.

In 2012, I became the Athletic Field Technician, overseeing the Catherine Hall facilities. Having previously worked with collegiate and professional sports teams, my expectations for field quality were high. At Catherine Hall, there are only two full-time employees charged with the care of all outdoor athletic facilities, myself and my assistant, Joe Barr.

My initial assessment of the football field found the soil to be compacted and the center of the field worn away. We seeded and topdressed with compost between the hashes and used an AerWay

aerator machine twice a week to relieve compaction. We reduced aerating to once a week after the season started, but the turf maintained its density.

Initially, we were using an older model paint machine that was slow and used a lot of paint. I met with the athletic director and explained how a newer, self-propelled paint machine would cut our time in half and drastically reduce our paint use. We decided to purchase a self-propelled machine that arrived only 1 week before football tryouts.

Joe explained that, before my arrival and using the old paint machine, they would only paint the lines, field numbers and hash marks down the center of the field. We decided it was time to do more and widened the sidelines and goal lines to 8 inches, added yard marks, and painted the coaches boxes solid white. We used a leftover bucket of brown paint to line both sides of the 20 yard lines to represent the red zone. The coaches marveled at the field's appearance and appreciated having a full stand of grass in the center of the field. Spectators commented that the field looked like that of a professional team and the greatest compliment came from the players saying how proud they were of their field.



After a very successful and rewarding football season, Joe's interest in athletic field's management grew. Over the winter months, Joe was out on medical leave and I would send him sports turf-based questions to quiz him on spreader and sprayer calibration, fertilizer selection and calculations, etc. I found mentoring Joe to be extremely rewarding and his passion for learning reenergizing to me.

In April of 2013, my wife and I moved to Maryland, leaving my position open for Joe to apply. In order to become an Athletic Field Technician, he had to pass an employment test administered by the MHS. Joe passed the test with a perfect score and to hear the joy in his voice when he called to tell me was one of the greatest feelings I ever had as a sports turf manager.

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

Joe Barr: In 2012 Jason Bowers, CSFM and our AD Dr. Sheila Deitrich decided it was time to include the athletics grounds crew in all necessary meetings. There is nothing better than a hand shake, face to face conversation. My assistant, Caleb Nippert, and I continue this today. We meet with the athletics managers every Monday. Every Wednesday the varsity athletic field tech, Mike Orban, and I meet with our supervisor, Phil Shirk, the manager of grounds and landscape. Every Friday Phil and I meet with Dr. Deitrich. Before every season we hold a meeting with the entire athletic staff.

One tip I would offer: Just be honest with all. Honesty goes a long way during a long season.

ST: What are your specific responsibilities? What is your favorite task? Least favorite?

Barr: I perform all duties required to prepare, maintain and repair all athletics fields and neighboring intramural fields. Duties include fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides, irrigation and field lay out for football, baseball, softball, soccer, field hockey, cross country, and track and field.

My favorite is baseball, I love it. I could work on a baseball field from dawn to dusk. I have no least favorite. Milton Hershey School treats us very well. I enjoy coming to work every single day.

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

Barr: After high school I played in a fast pitch softball league. I was one of very few volunteers to do field maintenance. From 1999 to 2011, I volunteered and led a field crew on many projects for the Annville Youth League and the Palmyra Baseball League. I really got the turf bug in 2003 when we completely rebuilt an unused baseball field. We completed it with backstop, dugouts, fencing, bullpens, and infield. We had NO large equipment help. All this was done with a lawn tractor and hand tools (I am not joking). We did it again at another location in 2008. That's when I decided this was what I really wanted to do and starting attending turf clinics at Lebanon Valley College and Penn State.

My first actual sports turf job was 6 years in the making. With a very limited turf background but an obvious passion for this type of work, MHS and Mr. Shirk took a chance on me. I worked grounds maintenance and assisted on athletics. Mike Orban was the one that had the task of introducing me into the real turf world. I am a hands-on type person, not great in a classroom. Show me how and I will not forget.

Mike had the patience to take the time to show me how. After I earned his trust, he would allow me lead many projects. I appreciate him very much for that. In 2012 Jason Bowers, CSFM was hired as Athletic Field Tech. I then became his assistant. Jason knew how bad I wanted to become an athletic field tech, he also knew I was not a classroom guy but I had to become one to pass my test. Well, he took me to school. We studied and he drilled me with questions every spare moment we had. He made me calibrate everything, every time. He would have questions on my desk waiting for me. When I was off for my shoulder surgery, Jason would e mail me from his home with questions. Jason then had me develop our 2013 turf program. In April 2013 I not only passed my MHS athletic field tech test, I aced it. I cannot thank him enough for what he did for me.

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

Barr: So glad you asked this question. Caleb Nippert and I completely repaired our baseball infield last fall. There is no substitute for hard work and attention to detail. A little damp moisture in the morning (not muddy or sticky) is ideal. Next a nail drag is perfect to work up about a 3/8" cushion. Then use a drag mat to get that perfect finish. After games and practices, pay attention to the area around the bases. Leading off the base and sliding will make holes. This needs to be pulled back and possibly rolled firm. Also pay attention to the lip around the infield. Good dragging technique and raking will go a long way in preserving this area. Pitching mound and batter's boxes need repaired and tamped after every use.

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

Barr: Mike, the varsity field tech, his assistant Rich Guttendorf, Caleb, and I are always willing to learn better and safer practices for our student athletes. We attend conferences, clinics and openly discuss practices with others in the industry. Time management is something we are battling the most. We have two techs with two assistants for Varsity and Jr. High. We have multiple fields for nearly every PIAA sport. Our facility is used by many outside organizations as well as daily physical education classes. Timing is everything for us.

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

Barr: Continued education and the growth in sports medicine will become a big part of our position. More fields are being built. There are more athletes at younger ages with all the travel leagues and after school programs. We need to concentrate on maintaining safe, playable fields. One of the very best sources for any sports turf manager is the STMA yearly conference. Last year was my first time. I was blown away at all the knowledge that was openly shared in the seminars, in the halls, in the restaurants. Everyone is willing to share everything to help each other learn more. From someone that never attended a full time college, I cannot express how important that is to me. This is a conference that should not be missed. Team owners, athletic directors, and supervisors at any level should consider sending their turf crews. Knowledge is power. ■

STMA would like to thank Carolina Green, Ewing, Hunter Industries and World Class Athletic Surfaces for their continued support of the Field of the Year Awards Program.