



▲ Ripken Stadium, Aberdeen, MD, home of the Single A IronBirds



▲ Neuroscience Group Field at Fox Cities Stadium, Appleton, WI

# TIPS ON MOWING PATTERNS IN YOUR BASEBALL TURF

**PATRICK “IRISH” COAKLEY, CSFM, sports turf superintendent, Ripken Baseball, Aberdeen, MD**

“I don’t map out anything ahead of time for the mowing I do. I try to keep my patterns all straight lines, mostly for practical reasons such as providing a guide for fertilizing or spraying. We have two mowers we use, John Deere 2653 models, and the width of cut matches my boom sprayer, for example. It makes for more efficient and quicker work.

“This year for our stadium field (home of short-season Single A Aberdeen IronBirds), we’ll be using a Deere walk-behind reel mower for the infield, which we got to minimize the amount of traffic on the infield.

“I can mow a straight line; it’s just a matter of picking a spot and making sure you stay symmetrical. Keep it simple. When you have straight lines it also is easier to change out the pattern, especially if you have constant play like we do at Ripken Baseball.

“Reel mowers have a ‘spiral’ roller on the front that lays the grass in one direction so when the light reflects off it the grass appears to be a different color. It’s like vacuuming a carpet in different directions; the reflecting light can make it appear to be two different colors. When grass keeps getting pushed in one direction, it lays down and can create a ball that zig zags. You mow in a different direction to stand that turf back up

“During homestands, especially if they last more than three games, we change up the patterns because if you let it go too long that mowing in the same direction will affect the roll of the ball, especially in the outfield. I’ve become a fan of the ‘blank slate’ look in the outfield as well, where there is no pattern. This is the best for playability. But

if you’re going with patterns, it’s best to choose two or three in advance so that it is easier to change from one to another without having to mow all day. It’s a matter of efficiency, and simpler.

“If the homestand is only 3 days, you can get more intricate because you might only cut the grass one time in those three days, especially if you’re using PGRs.

“It’s all about efficiency for me; not taking too much time on the mower while not compromising playability.”

**EDDIE WARCZAK, manager, grounds, Milwaukee Brewers\***

“Over the years I have done many different patterns in both the outfield and the infield ranging from simple straight lines and checkers to team logos and baseballs. I have learned different methods from a variety of people in the industry but I have also learned a lot through trial and error.

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“We try to change the pattern at least once a month however with our harsh spring and busy tournament schedule the first half of the baseball season the pattern doesn’t always get changed out as frequently.” — *Eddie Warczak*

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Photo by Mike Irvins



Photo by David Mellor



Photo courtesy of  
Briggs & Stratton Power Products Group

“Mapping patterns depends greatly on the type of pattern. If we are doing straight lines, a checker board, or diamonds a simple string line to follow for the first cut does the trick. After the initial line is down I just work out from there. If however, we are doing something such as the team logo, then we use graphing paper followed by a grid of string lines on the field. We draw the logo on graphing paper, the graphing paper helps in converting the measurements you want. From there we will decide how large we want the logo in the turf, after that it is just simply staking out the string line to the correct measurements on the field and following the line with a mower.

“We try to change the pattern at least once a month however with our harsh spring and busy tournament schedule the first half of the baseball season the pattern doesn’t always get changed out as frequently. We usually have a schedule of when we want to change the pattern and that includes what type of pattern. I like to start out the early season with just simple straight lines due to lack of staffing, weaker turf, and a busier schedule. By mid-season the turf is stronger, we have more staff, and our schedule plateaus, which allows us to lay-out more intricate designs.

“To layout a pattern we generally use a walk behind greens mower (Jacobsen Greens King) to cut the infield turf as well as any outfield logos. When we do not have a logo in the outfield we will use a Jacobsen Tri-King to mow the entire outfield as well as foul territory. Another tool to help put in the pattern is a push broom. The push broom allows us to simply broom the turf the direction we want it which assists in designing the tight areas of a logo or a star.”

\*Warczak was promoted to MLB this winter; his response here was referring to his time as head groundskeeper for the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers, a Class A team located in Appleton.

#### **DAVID MELLOR, Director of Grounds, Boston Red Sox**

“We create patterns using line strings, irrigation flags and tape measures, and we step away or get above to see how our outlines are shaping up. We ‘connect the dots’ with a walk-behind greens mower’s roller; it’s the roller that etches in your design. While we use Toro Reelmaster mowers we also use Simplicity lawn and garden tractor.

The full width rollers on the free floating Simplicity mower deck bend in the grass design.

“What tools we use depends on how intricate the pattern is. Other tools we use could include push brooms, rakes, and small round carpenter rollers, which we push to bend the grass down and can then be picked up at the end of the pattern section where a larger piece of equipment can’t turn around because of limited space. We use this when we are putting the stripes in the toes of the hanging sox logo and also when making the B STRONG pattern for 2013 MLB post season for example.

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These are great for tight areas where there is no room to turn, and it can cut down on turf wear.

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“For those on a budget, you can build your own roller too. Get some PVC pipe 4 to 10 inches in diameter and 24-36 inches long, fill it with concrete and connect it to an old mower handle. You can usually find one of those at a dealer’s ‘mower graveyard’. Then you can use electrical conduit pipe to extend the length and/or width and attach the roller to the mower handle. These are great for tight areas where there is no room to turn, and it can cut down on turf wear.

“If your field drains very well you also can use water pressure to bend in your design but you must take care to keep safety and playability your first priority. The first time we put in a unique design 3 days before a game we may also use a 1-inch hose with an adjustable nozzle, to help create a unique pattern. Always be careful to not create any safety or playability issues from using any water.

“We change our pattern every 7 to 10 days because we don’t want the grass to start growing sideways affecting playability, and changing the pattern spreads out the wear. When we are considering patterns we can’t work too far in advance though, because you have to take into account the weather, whether there’s been or will be an external event on the field and so on. You certainly don’t want to add any stress to the grass.” ■