

PARK HILL SOUTH LADY PANTHERS SOFTBALL FIELD, Riverside, MO



Category of Submission: Schools/Parks Softball

Sports Turf Manager: Eric Jones

Title: Head Groundskeeper

Experience: I have worked on athletic fields in the Park Hill School District for 15 years. I started working here as a summer job and it eventually led to my managing a high school sports complex and campus.

Original construction: 2007

Turfgrass variety: The softball field was originally sodded with Quickstand bermudagrass in 2007. In the fall the field is overseeded with ryegrass to keep the field green once it cools down. When I have a bare spot I use a cup cutter to take sod pieces from my nursery.

Rootzone composition: Native soil and clay





WHY STMA SHOULD CONSIDER YOUR FIELD A WINNER?

In 2007 my district remodeled our athletic complex creating a new softball field. I was involved in the design process. I choose to use bermudagrass since it would play perfectly coming out of the summer and into the fall season and is very low maintenance in the spring. Bermuda is not common in the Kansas City area. I also had the idea to have a grass infield. Most people thought I was insane, but I was able to sell everyone on it.

Since the bermuda is a warm season grass it is able to take the use and abuse of softball camps in July followed by practices in August and games in September thru October. When the field was constructed, red shale was used for the infield; it was new to me and I did not know exactly how to manage it. I quickly learned not to work it up too much and keep it moist.

Before the season, we apply 25 bags of Turface MVP and nail drag it into the first ¼ of an inch. We apply moisture to it as much as possible. I have found the best way to manage the skin is to lightly nail drag and take a field broom over the top.

My biggest challenge with the softball field is time, balancing my other tasks along with maintaining the field. I am responsible for five athletic fields plus a high school campus. I am responsible for everything, I have to mow, seed, aerate, spray pesticides, irrigate, paint fields and set up and clean-up after events. I also have had to paint the dugouts and foul polls, do equipment maintenance and landscape the common area around the field. During the season I find myself constantly edging the field. I frequently use a loop hoe and edger.

In the summer of 2012, I started my own sod farm with the edgings from my field. After a year's worth of care it has multiplied exponentially. I have been able to use the sod pieces for filling in bare spots on the field.

The weather over the past year was a big challenge. We had a drought all last summer into fall then a winter full of snow. It seemed like the snow would never end, we even had snow in the beginning of May. Finally the summer was abnormally cool causing the bermuda to struggle, until late August when it then got hot.

I've learned in this profession you can't have a bad day or take time off, you have to make the best out of every second you have. Good or bad everyone sees your work. It is my goal every day to provide a safe professional looking field.

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

Jones: Communication is actually one of the bigger challenges for me. I am outside working on the fields, while the coaches and administrators are in the schools doing their day jobs. The only time the coach has to contact me is the 5 minutes between classes. We find ourselves playing a lot of phone tag.

ST: What are your specific responsibilities?

Jones: I maintain an athletic complex consisting of five natural grass sports field and one artificial field, and several acres of common area.

ST: What tasks do you find most enjoyable?

Jones: The most enjoyable part of my job is being outdoors and at the end of the day getting to see the final product that the athletes enjoy playing on.

ST: What task is your least favorite and why?

Jones: My least favorite task is picking up the equipment and belongings that the teams do not clean up after themselves.

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

Jones: I have worked on athletic fields in the Park Hill School District for 15 years. I started working here as a summer job but it eventually led to me managing a high school sports complex.

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

Jones: My infield skin is red shale; before the season I apply calcite clay and nail drag it into the top ¼ of an inch. During the season I lightly nail drag, field broom and apply moisture to it as needed.

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

Jones: This year I would like to redo the bullpens by adding clay bricks to the pitching rubber and home plate area. It is my goal every year to try to do something new, such as a new logo, landscaping around the field or anything that will improve the field/facility.

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

Jones: In the future I see the sports turf manager's job becoming more professional and more concerned with safety of the student-athletes. ■

Equipment List

- 1977 B36000 Ford tractor
- John Deere 2653A Triplex Reel mower
- John Deere Tx turf Gator
- 6 foot Aerway aerator
- McLane edger
- Earthway broadcast spreader
- Echo backpack blower
- Homemade nail drag
- 7 foot wide infield finish broom
- Aerosol field marking machine
- Tamper
- Backpack Sprayer
- Field laser painter
- 2-30 inch field rakes
- 4-loop hoes
- 2-24 inch brooms
- Barrowed-Turfco Sod cutter

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