

RENOVATING Parkview Field in Fort Wayne

Renovation of a baseball field at the amateur, collegiate, or professional level can be a daunting and expensive task. However, when the condition or appearance of a field warrants a “makeover,” dollars should be secondary to player safety, and at the professional level, the overall aesthetics of the playing surface.

In the fall of 2012, Parkview Field in downtown Fort Wayne, IN home of the San Diego Padres Class A affiliate Fort Wayne TinCaps, was the site for a complete field renovation. Constructed in the fall of 2008 for a spring 2009

opening, the field was dominated by *poa annua*. Despite winning Midwest League Field of the Year awards in 2010, 2011, and 2012, the front office, field manager, and city officials (the ballpark is owned by the City of Fort Wayne), agreed that field replacement was necessary.

Planning for the project actually began a year earlier as The Motz Group, the original field contractor, was contacted in regards to a replacement schedule. Pre-renovation planning is paramount in paving the way for a smooth, efficient, and cost-effective agenda. First and foremost, the dollars need to be allocated to do the work. Most complete field renova-





tions of sand-based fields cost in the \$200,000-\$250,000 range. A presentation made to the city's Redevelopment Commission in the fall of 2011 confirmed the dollars for the labor and materials (sod, rootzone, warning track material), setting in motion the process of selecting the sod farm. Graff's Turf Farm in Fort Morgan, CO was selected based on the quality of their short-cut, 100% bluegrass. A July 2012 visit to the farm to inspect the turf plot confirmed everything was in place for the harvesting and shipping that fall.

Furthermore, consultation with our front office on limiting the number of games and events in 2013 played a key part in assuring a successful grow-in. No other baseball games were scheduled besides the TinCaps's dates, and other on-field activity was restricted until the fall, giving the field almost an entire year to develop.

Work began on the field the second week of September after the team made a run to the Midwest League finals, and 2 weeks before a major on-field running event the last Saturday of the month that brings more than 10,000 runners to Parkview Field. The entire oblong infield horn (created during initial field installation) was reconfigured, constructing a more traditional 95-foot arc from the mound. This meant removing large amounts of clay and sod from areas to establish the new symmetry. This work was all done by the grounds crew with a 3-ton mini-excavator and a lot of hand digging and edging.

On October 1 The Motz Group moved in with their Koro Field Topmaker and began stripping and grinding the existing sod layer. The Koro conveyor shoots the pulverized material into trailers pulled by tractors to get the debris off-site. More pre-planning put in place bagged meters and traffic control devices to block off a lane of parking and traffic on the road adjacent to the field ramp. From there, 700 cubic yards of material was hauled away thanks to a large front loader and 30-35 dump truck loads.

As the sod was stripped from infield, baseline, and warning track edges, re-working of all edges was done with hand spades by the grounds crew. This is the only chance you ever get to create a new edge, and meticulous attention and time was spent to make the rootzone, clay, warning track transition zones as perfect as possible.

All 88,000 square feet of sod was stripped in 2 days. As the rootzone was exposed, 70 tons of new 92% sand, 8% peat was brought in and laser graded. The infield turf area was dropped from a .1% grade to level, and all the outfield and sidelines were laser graded to spec. At this point we were ready to sod, but . . .

» A total of **22 trucks** bearing anywhere from 20-22 rolls made the hike to Fort Wayne.

With an extremely high content of *poa annua* infestation in the field, the decision was made to fumigate the entire turf area before the new sod was brought in. Using Basamid (dazomet) dropped from a 36-inch drop spreader, a 10-day window was allowed to kill off any remaining *poa* seed or plant material. Fumigation is based on soil temperatures and moisture. Moisture causes the release of vapors which penetrate the soil particles and upon contact, kill plant matter, seeds, insects, and anything living. The higher the soil temperature, the faster it works. Because dazomet is a restricted product, application was made using a respirator and full Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) attire. Additionally, barricades and posted signs around the ballpark restricted access to the field area as gases were emitted.

After a 10-day fumigation window, work resumed on October 15. Before that, an organic granular starter fertilizer (5-6-6) was applied on the exposed rootzone at a rate of 10lbs/M. The maxi-rolls of Graff's short cut bluegrass began to arrive on flat bed trucks from Colorado, which was a 1,070 mile one-way trip! A total of 22 trucks bearing anywhere from 20-22 rolls made the hike to Fort Wayne. Assistant groundskeeper Andrew Burnette off-loaded the rolls with a skid steer and The Motz Group crew went to work, rolling out sod and pulling in seams. The TinCaps grounds crew concentrated on perfecting edges while Motz laid "the carpet." At the end of Day One, the infield and skirts were completed. After waiting on the intermittent arrival of sod trucks, it took 2 more days to finish the outfield. When all 88,000 square feet of new sod was in place, another round of granular starter fertilizer (5-6-6) went down at the same rate. A couple of days later, we began our foliar fertility with a good dose of micronutrients, potassium, and magnesium.

October 22, 22 tons of DuraEdge Pro infield mix arrived for infield lasing grading. The skin and base paths were pulverized with a Blecavator, the infield mix was worked in, laser graded, and rolled. An additional load of warning track material (crushed lava rock) was distributed on the edges to bring all the new turf edges flush.

Our fall granular organic program commenced two weeks later with a 21-3-7, followed by two more foliar applications in November,



STMA conference in Daytona Beach. Colder weather in February brought the plant dormant, but when the weather broke in March, we were thrilled with the root establishment, and set out to get the plant roaring out of the gate. We hit the turf with a 5-28-0 to get the phosphorous going for root growth, and introduced a bio-nutritional program (mycorrhizae & humates) to get beneficial microbes into the soil profile, especially after the total fumigation in the fall.

Typically divergent Midwestern spring weather brought the bluegrass into full bloom by early May, and the players and public were awestruck by the continuity and eye pleasing beauty of a new palette of great looking turf.

There are no shortcuts when it comes to the work and cost involved in baseball field renovation. But with the proper pre-planning, contractor and sod selection, and due diligence in on-going cultural practices, a well-done renovation provides the kind of safe playing

and finally another 21-3-7 granular in early December. A shot of PCNB before the first major snow fall had us prepared for winter and the establishment of some good root mass.

Excellent color remained in the turf until time for the January surface and intrinsic beauty that should be the goal of every sports turf manager. ■

Keith Winter is head groundskeeper for the Fort Wayne TinCaps.

Keith Winter is head groundskeeper for the Fort Wayne TinCaps.

CLUTCH CONDITIONS REQUIRE A DEPENDABLE SOLUTION

A custom Growth Products Nutrition Program can keep your turf looking pristine and strike out environmental stress. Call your local sales rep today to design a program that solves your "clutch conditions".

High Winds

Extreme Sunlight

Minimal Rainfall

Poor Water

Foot Traffic

Growth Products has been a pioneer in technically advanced liquid fertilizers, micronutrients and effective biological control products designed for turf care for over 30 years.

Scan the QR Code with your smart phone or visit Youtube.com/GrowthProducts to see how one head groundskeeper solved his clutch conditions