"We're a team," explains Gary Vandenberg, director of grounds for the Milwaukee Brewers Baseball Club, when speaking of assistant Dave Mellor. "Dave and I get along very well and think a lot alike. Dave handles the day-to-day scheduling of the crew while I handle the budgeting and management chores."

One thing they both agree on is John Deere. "Our John Deere equipment allows us to do a better job," says Mellor. "For example, the 1200A is so fast and efficient that we can groom the entire infield in just five minutes. That means we can go out and smooth the skinned area between pregame batting and infield practices. Players appreciate that extra touch."

Vandenberg and Mellor's equipment fleet includes a John Deere 1200A Field Rake, 2653 Utility Mower, 220 Greens Mower, Gator® Utility Vehicles, and 1800 Sprayer.

"The 1800 is like a Cadillac," says Vandenberg. "You have all the controls at your fingertips and the wide boom allows you to make fewer passes. I've never seen anything better."

"If one thing stands out about the John Deere equipment, it's that we've had virtually no downtime," concludes Mellor. "We count on the machines and they haven't let us down — and that goes for the entire John Deere organization."

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NOTHING RUNS LIKE A DEERE®
A John Deere 220 Greens Mower is used on the infield and 2653 Utility Mower on the outfield to produce Milwaukee County Stadium’s dramatic striping patterns.

The John Deere 1200A Field Rake is used to groom Milwaukee’s infield and warning track. Hydraulic control of the rear field finisher allows an operator to adjust the down-pressure of the implement as needed.
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Last January, 600 tons of bluegrass and a sod squad from the East raced 1,000 miles to Wisconsin in an attempt to transform the pigpen of Lambeau Field into sure-footed turf for the onslaught of the Green Bay Packers-Carolina Panthers playoff game. Overcoming near-zero-degree temperatures, snow storms and other adversities, they succeeded beyond anyone's wildest expectations.

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On the Cover: Chief Scientist Jim Beard (right) of International Sports Turf Research Institute (ISTRI) and Bob Vaughn of Pure Seed Research conduct tests with ISTRI's wear machine at Pure Seed's facility near Canby, Oregon. Photo courtesy: Steve Guise.
TORN UP

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For over a decade, Delta Bluegrass has been producing and installing the industry's highest quality peat sod. Give us a call for more information on Hybrid Bermudas and other varieties of our premium sods - Your turf will be glad you did!
More and More Recognition

In last month's article about 1996-97 Beam Clay College Baseball Diamond of the Year award winner Mark Light Stadium (University of Miami), we neglected to mention that Head Groundskeeper Kevin C. Hardy and his crew provide maintenance for the university through Unisco Service Company, a multi-service provider that deserves to be recognized for its support of Hardy's efforts.

While on the subject of recognition, we'd like to note that the one problem with the Beam Clay Baseball Diamond of the Year awards, now a decade old, is that there just aren't enough of them to go around. So many sports turf managers are doing so much with so little that three awards just don't seem enough to recognize all the hard work and dedication going into baseball diamonds. For this reason, we're glad that the American Baseball Coaches Association (ABCA) and Turface Sports Field Products began sponsoring the Outstanding Field Maintenance Awards three years ago, and we are pleased to announce the results.

During ABCA's annual banquet last winter, the Outstanding Field Maintenance Award at the college level was given to Baylor University, Waco, Texas. At the high school level, Deerfield Beach High School, Deerfield Beach, Florida, won the award.

The awards were presented by Joe Betulius, Turface product manager.

Two other awards, the Field Maintenance Scholarships, were presented to Franklin College, Franklin, Indiana, and Camelback High School, Phoenix, Arizona. The scholarships are awarded "to coaches and teams that best demonstrated a need and a strong desire to improve their fields for maximum athletic performance and safety for their athletes."

Additional recognition for the work sports turf managers are doing comes from the NFL Players Association (NFLPA), which announced the results of its latest league-wide player survey concerning NFL clubs' playing surfaces.

The written survey was conducted by NFLPA staff members at team meetings during the 1996 NFL season, as a follow-up to a similar survey conducted during the 1994 NFL season. The 1996 survey revealed that 86.7% of the 1,034 players who answered preferred to play on natural grass (up from 86.1% in 1994), while only 6.3% preferred artificial turf (down from 7% in 1994), and 7% had no preference (8% in 1994). Almost three-quarters (74%) of NFL players in this survey also indicated that playing on a natural grass surface was either very important or somewhat important in selecting the teams they would consider signing with as free agents (up from 70% in 1994).

The players also chose the five "best" NFL playing fields, all of which are natural grass surfaces. In order of preference, they are Tampa Stadium, Miami's Pro Player Park (formerly Joe Robbie Stadium), Jacksonville Stadium, Arizona's Sun Devil Stadium and Kansas City's Arrowhead Stadium.

Does it surprise you that, at the bottom of the list, the five "worst" stadiums all had artificial turf? We refrain from mentioning the stadiums' names, but if you'd like to know who they are or want a copy of the survey, call the NFLPA at (202) 463-2200.
The STMA Certification Committee held a day-long planning session on March 16th laying the preliminary groundwork for a certification program. The committee will be presenting its recommendations to the STMA Board for consideration at the July 11-12 board meeting. Because the committee, and STMA, want the program to answer the needs and concerns of the individual sports turf manager, and of the sports turf industry, a call for input from STMA members was issued in the March-April issue of our newsletter, Sports Turf Manager.

Consider this message a call for your input on the certification program and, further, a call to join the national association, if you have not already done so. If you are an active participant in the sports turf industry in any contributing capacity — administrative or hands-on management, turf-related education and training, supplier of products or services — STMA needs you. And you need STMA. Responsiveness to industry demands and needs comes through communication and cooperation. Working together, we have the resources and strength to accomplish great things.

Speaking of great things, the 1998 Conference and Exhibition coming up January 14-18 will be just that. The STMA Board met at the Walt Disney World Sports Complex on March 14 and 15 to check out some of the exciting things that will be incorporated into the conference. This truly impressive 200-acre site offers athletic opportunities for over 30 sports — and conference attendees will see it all. Our headquarters hotel is another Disney property, the Coronado Springs Resort. We'll take full advantage of its unique design and excellent meeting facilities. If you have not had a Disney experience (like me before the March meeting), polish off your “Wow!” Every “cast member” (as Disney personnel are called) is there to serve you.

There’s more. The Conference Committee is putting together two different Seminar on Wheels opportunities and a golf outing. And, just in case you’d like to tie this Florida trip to family vacation time, the committee is working with Disney to set up special multi-day, multi-park programs for the Walt Disney World attractions.

You’ll want to come early or stay late to fit it all in.
A member of STMA, Greg Freix attends “every sports turf seminar I can work into the schedule.” Photos courtesy: Greg Freix.

Wausau’s Athletic Park Wins Municipal Diamond of the Year

By Bob Tracinski

A limited budget, a packed schedule and north-central Wisconsin’s short growing season make baseball field maintenance a constant challenge for Park Manager Greg Freix and his staff. So, the moment seemed even sweeter when the 1996-1997 Beam Clay Baseball Diamond of the Year Award in the Schools, Municipalities and Parks category went to their field, Wausau’s Athletic Park, the premier facility of the City of Wausau and Marathon County Park Department.

Freix says, “We strive to have the field prepped consistently for every event. That’s what it’s all about.” And that attitude and commitment pay off in quality.

The baseball field of Athletic Park is one of 13 diamonds located throughout the city. The closest is a Little League field located behind Athletic Park.

The Wausau Park area has been used since the early 1900s, which is reflected by the older residential neighborhood that surrounds it. During the Work Projects era of the 1930s, a stone wall was constructed three-quarters of the way around the park when the original infrastructure was built. The only open section of the diamond ran from right center field to left center field, a space now filled with bill boards added in the late 1970s as a fund-raiser for the field’s primary user.

Freix says, “The park is essentially land-locked, but that’s not all bad. The community, and the city, consider it ‘theirs.’ For all events, people park along the neighborhood streets and walk to the facility. We have bleacher seating for 1,800 and, with a packed house, have reached attendance levels of 2,500 to 2,700.

“Everyone enters through the main gate behind the grandstand area and walks up to the bleachers, so their first glimpse of the field is similar to the experience of entering a major league facility.”

Freix and crew are very conscious of the “wow” factor, the reaction of players and spectators alike when they get that first look at the field. The maintenance program is focused on delivering the playing level anticipated by those first perceptions.

Freix says, “Because of our northern location, we have an average of 115 to 125 playing days available for an average 150 game schedule. An April 1st season opener used to be planned, but we’ve moved that to April 15th, and we’re lucky to get up to three games in before early May. The season ends in mid-August. In 1995, a record of 162 games were played here. In 1996, we worked in 161 games with 111 days available for play. Obviously, there are lots of doubles.”

Until recently, the last major field work had been completed in the 1940s, so with the combination of heavy use and the native clay soil, the infield became “a lake” following rain. At times, crews resorted to digging holes and installing sump pumps to get water off the field.

Renovation began in August of 1993 to improve both surface and subsurface drainage. The infield was excavated to a three-foot depth and the original material hauled off site for fill on
A Great Group

behind the mound for irrigation. By
Marathon County. After a year, he
taking a position as horticulturist for
Point, planning a career in forestry.

the University of Wisconsin, Stevens
ryegrass using Pinnacle and Premier."

10-inch layer of material covers
the drainage system. In the turf-cov-
ered portion of the infield, the materi-
als consists of a sandy-loam native soil
that was screened off-site and trucked
in. A local landscaper laser graded the
field, establishing a one percent crown.

Freix says, "The skinned area,
including the base paths, was filled
with a mixture of 60 percent sharp
sand and 40 percent clay loam. This
was mixed off-site and trucked in. It's
similar to the infield material of the
turfed area, just a little bit sandier.
The renovation has allowed us to get in
most of our games as scheduled. We
generally can play except when it's
actually raining or there's lightning.
Following the renovation, the skinned
area was playable within 15 minutes
of our heaviest rain."

The city's budget for the field
improvement wouldn't stretch enough
for an in-ground, automatic sprinkler
system. A quick coupler was installed
behind the mound for irrigation. By
mid-September, the reconstruction
was completed and the infield seeded
with a ball-field mixture from
Reinderers Brothers consisting of 75
percent Kentucky bluegrass
(Touchdown, America and Banff) and
25 percent perennial ryegrass (Cutter
II).

Freix says, "We overseeded with
annual ryegrass in the spring of 1994
to create a nurse crop cover for the
young field. At the end of the 1995 sea-
son, we killed the existing outfield turf
with glyphosate and seeded with a
mixture from LaCrosse Seed Company
consisting of 60 percent Kentucky
bluegrass using Bartitia, Alene and
Ken-Blue and 40 percent perennial
ryegrass using Pinnacle and Premier."

A Great Group

Freix is in his sixth year as park
manager for the Wausau/Marathon
County Park Department. He earned a
BS degree in forest management from
the University of Wisconsin, Stevens
Point, planning a career in forestry.
Instead, he spent six years working for
Chemlawn in various capacities before
taking a position as horticulturist for
Marathon County. After a year, he
advanced to his current position in
1989.

A member of the national Sports
Turf Managers Association and the
Wisconsin Turfgrass Association, he's
attended "every sports turf seminar I
can work into the schedule." He espe-
cially enjoys the tremendous variety,
and challenge, of maintaining a top
quality facility. He gives credit to his
wife, Yvonne, who is supportive
through all the demands of his position
and keeps things running smoothly at
home with three-year-old Clare and
nine-month-old Jackson.

Less than half of Freix's work time
is committed to the Athletic Park base-
ball facility. For assistance, he calls on
the Parks Operations Department for
such time- and equipment-intensive
projects as aeration. He calls their sup-
port "excellent."

Freix says, "Though the rest of my
crew members are seasonal, many of
them were 'repeaters,' with some even
working at the park before I came on
board. We've had a great group with
total dedication to do the job right.

"Two people are assigned to the 11
ball diamonds at other sites and six
people are assigned to Athletic Park.
Two of these people come on staff the
first of April and work until mid to late
August. Most of the other six crew
members are college students who join
us at the end of May or in early June
and work until their class sessions
begin in the fall, usually around the
end of August. This will be a transi-
tional year for us, because most of this
crew have completed their formal
schooling and are moving on to full-
time positions in other areas."

Seven Days a Week

Besides developing and overseeing
park maintenance, Freix handles all
field scheduling, no easy task with a
lighted facility open for play seven
days — and nights — a week. He says,
"The park is home to the Wausau
Woodchucks baseball team, a summer
college team which is a member of the
Northwoods Baseball League. The
field also is home for three local high
schools, a Legion team, three adult
league teams, Babe Ruth baseball and
Senior League baseball (Little
League). Many other non-local teams
use the field if and when it's available.

"Athletic Park also is host to sever-
ral tournaments each season and sever-
ally organized events, most of
which are held on weekends. This will
be the 25th year for the Wisconsin
State Baseball Tournament, which
brings us 13 games in 3 days. For the
last 15 years, the Breakfast Optimists
have held a tournament for the Senior
League that packs 10 to 15 games into

"Wow" is generally the reaction of those who visit Wausau's Athletic Park for
the first time.
back to back, we have to rely on the integrity of our overall maintenance program to carry us through." That program includes core aeration at least twice a year to at least a three-inch depth. This is done once in the spring and once in the fall, and more frequently if conditions warrant. The level of compaction, degree of heat and time available are critical factors. The cores are dragged in. Crews Overseed weekly with a pregerminated seed mix. They also fill in divots with a mixture of pregerminated seed and sand or calcined clay. They do this weekly for the infield and on an "as needed" basis in the outfield.

The field is fertilized four or five times a year with the timing and amount of nitrogen and supplemental nutrients based on soil-test results, weather patterns, and growing conditions. Soil tests are conducted every two years. Modifying potash and pH levels are usually the two basic adjustments needed. The last fertilization of the year is scheduled for the end of October or the beginning of November to prepare the turf for the following spring.

The field is mowed every two days. A tow-behind, 3-gang reel mower clips the outfield turf to 1 3/4 inches. A walk-behind rotary mower trimmed the infield turf to 1 1/2 inches in past years, but a riding reel mower will be added this year.

Insects and grassy weeds are not a problem, and broadleaf weeds are minimal. Those that do appear are spot treated with a Trimec solution administered from a backpack sprayer during spring and fall field checks.

But the same total enclosure that helps keep weeds at bay creates conditions that increase the incidence of diseases, especially pythium. Freix follows IPM principles of close observation and cultural adjustments, applying a combination of preventive and curative fungicides as needed.

Infield watering is basically by