There isn’t much of an off-season at Network Associates Coliseum in Oakland, California. At least not for Head Groundskeeper Clay Wood and his grounds crew. After maintaining a diamond for most of the year for the baseball Athletics, Clay and his crew have to make sure the field is ready and striped for the football Raiders. To keep both clubs running on a good surface, Clay and his crew rely on John Deere turf equipment. “I won’t buy anything else,” says Clay. “John Deere equipment has come full circle. They have great quality in terms of mowers, reels, and blades. The 1200A Field Rake is a real workhorse for us. And I’ve never heard anybody say anything but good things about the 2653A Utility Mower. It’s great quality and a great relationship.” To see John Deere perform on your field, call your local John Deere turf distributor or 1-800-537-8233.
The McInnish Complex crew leader, Jorge Hernandez, works with a crew of six (David Conrad, Paul Wood, Gregorio Escareno, Matt Acker, Hayward Potts, Genaro Hererra), Josey Ranch crew leader, Gregg Woods, with a crew of four (Rogelio Hererra, Jorge Felan, Mark Berry, Anaceto Marquez). Babbitt and Ward give the credit for excellent field conditions to their staff. They note, "Our staff is a special group and we're lucky to be working with them. Not one of them looks at this as just a job. They're determined to have the best fields around and willing to do whatever it takes to make that happen."

The five softball fields of the McInnish Complex were originally constructed in 1980 with a native clay/loam soil profile. The outfield and the non-skinned area of the infield were established with common Bermudagrass turf. A 1 percent slope was designed to channel surface water toward the outfield and off the playing surface.

These softball fields were renovated in 2000, because they were all grass fields. Ward says, "Over the years the skinned area material around the bases had built up, actually creating humps. We had to remove not only the existing turf, but also all that excess material, to construct totally skinned infield. To complicate matters, this project was in process during an unusually rainy period, 23 inches in all. We still completed it in time to hold our spring events as scheduled."

The material used for the infields and the warning track is a combination of red clay sand of a reddish-brown color and decomposed granite sand, both blended with soil conditioner. Ward says, "Twelve pounds of infield conditioner per ton of infield mix has been the perfect mixture for our fields. In 2001, we had fewer rainout days than the other municipal fields in the Dallas area. We had no tournament rainout.

They're determined to have the best field around and willing to do whatever it takes to make that happen."
It's hard to go wrong when you're choosing between two new warm-season turfgrass varieties as outstanding as SeaIsle 1 Seashore Paspalum and TifSport Bermudagrass. These two new patented cultivars can only be sold as certified sod or sprigs, and only by a member of a select group of licensed growers. Our top-quality producers have agreed to a stringent set of production practices. This means the grass you buy from a Florida, Georgia or South Carolina grower is going to be the same grass you buy from a Texas or California grower. And it'll be the same 10 years down the road. If you're involved with the installation or on-going maintenance of a sports field, you'll really appreciate how these turfgrasses compare to Tifway 419 and the other older varieties in use today.

While SeaIsle 1 is similar in texture and wear tolerance to hybrid bermudas, it may offer a number of important advantages. First and foremost, it can handle multiple stresses: prolonged drought, high salt levels, waterlogging and extremely high or low soil pH levels. Secondly, SeaIsle 1 can tolerate most types of alternate water sources, including wastewater, effluent, gray water, brackish water, and even ocean water. It requires less irrigating, less fertilizer and only minimal pesticide applications when compared to other warm-season cultivars. It also handles cloudy conditions and the low light intensity of domed stadiums extremely well. That's why it was such a good choice for the Houston Astros' new field.

Looking for a bermudagrass that can stand up to the stress and demands of big-time sports, to the wear and tear of football and soccer cleats, to the punishment of baseball slides, dives and spikes? Relax; you've found it. TifSport also has outstanding color, disease resistance and cold hardiness. In fact, TifSport is performing with flying colors in stadiums as far north as FedEx Field in Landover, Maryland, on up to the Ravens' PSi Net Stadium in Baltimore. If you're a sports turf manager, you know what's important for a playing field - outstanding density, turf strength and turf quality. You need a grass that recovers quickly from day-in-and-day-out abuse. That's just what TifSport has been bred to do. Be sure to ask for TifSport by name. It makes an attractive, dark green turf.

Take a look at its pluses and specify SeaIsle 1 for your new sports field or renovation project.
Field of the Year

"Turf damage prevention efforts turned to repair after an armadillo was spotted climbing over the fence."

edging, and trash pick up. The ballfields are mowed twice a week, to a one-inch height, with a five-reel ride-on mower. The complexes' non-field turf is mowed once a week. The crew leader focuses on the irrigation systems, the security and field lighting systems, and the field condition and safety inspections, including the bleachers and fencing, as well as the playing surfaces. Both crews combined work on a rotating 6-day schedule so weekend maintenance is covered. Three people cover the weekend detail, and get the following Monday off. They arrive at 4:00 or 5:00 AM and do all the tournament preparation.

The field hosts play for everything from recreational sports to company league teams to slow pitch major softball and girl's fast pitch competitive tournaments. The staff puts up the 200-foot temporary sports fence and moves the bases for the fast pitch games. The majority of play uses the standard field configuration.

Babbitt and Ward both laugh as they note that staff vacations must typically be packed into the only extended period of downtime, December. Spring field preparations start in January with play in full swing by February. They've made adjustments to the overall maintenance program to compensate for the high level of field use. For example, they've opted to avoid the surface disruption of core aeration, and compensate with an aggressive slice aeration schedule.

Weather-related issues, such as a day or two of rain, mean the staff must push even harder to catch up. The nature center within the complex adds a few challenges as well. The staff is vigilant in eliminating weed and insect invasions and takes an aggressive, pro-active approach to fire ant control. Because the complex is close to a river, the City's environmental services generally apply mosquito controls once in the spring and once in the summer.

The most unusual nature center invaders have been the armadillos. Babbitt says, "During drought conditions a few years ago, the only green turf remaining was on the irrigated turf of our athletic fields. Armadillos were seeking out this green turf at night and tearing up the fields in their search for grubs. It looked like a bunch of golfers had been chipping shots. The crew closed off everything they could and even put trash cans in front of the dugouts to stop the attacks. Then, early one morning, one of our crew members watched in amazement as a crafty armadillo climbed up one side of our chain link fence and down the other. So we shifted our focus from prevention to repair."

Ward names the lighting at the championship field as the biggest challenge. It was installed in 1980, during the original construction. He says, "Because the system is outdated, we are constantly having ballast and bulbs burn out. We've also spent considerable time redirecting the light, but have been able to keep the lights at 31 candlepower. With all the other projects in development, it will be a while longer before we can consider replacement of the system."

With so many public athletic fields to maintain, and with a limited municipal budget, field quality depends on staff commitment and dedication to providing the best possible playing surfaces. Babbitt says, "Because of the incredible job our staff does, no one could tell how much softball is played on this field just by looking at it."

"League softball starts in February and ends in November. It's scheduled six nights a week, Sunday through Friday. Beginning in March, and ending in October, we have tournaments almost every weekend. These run all day Saturday and sometimes continue into Sunday morning. This field is used 235 days a year, with a minimum of three games and as many as twelve games a day."

"There are 154 teams in our league. A typical night will put four games on the field between 6:30 and 10:30 PM. The first tournament of 2002 drew 64 teams; the second 40 teams. Each put 12 games on the field on Saturday and 8 games on Sunday. We estimate that overall, 900 games per year are played on this field. Thanks to our staff, it looks like each game is the first of the season."
These are just a few of the top names from more than a hundred seed varieties that United Horticultural Supply has to offer the turf professional. No other seed marketing and distribution company has as many top quality seed products to offer in all categories and is able to serve every level of customer requirement.

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In & On the Ground

Painting a masterpiece
How to turn your football field into a work of art

BY JOHN KMITTA, SENIOR EDITOR

The surface is many times larger than a standard 18-by-24-inch artist's canvas; it is green instead of white; and it is destined to get wet, dirty, and trampled. Despite these challenges, a football field is the turf manager's blank slate. Each week, that slate is filled with the precise white lines, colorful end zones, and specialty logos that become a masterpiece of functionality.

When painting a field, several factors must come together to determine whether the end result will be a masterpiece—set up steps, tools, application methods, the climate and, of course, the paint.

According to Carbit Paint Company, a Chicago-based manufacturer of natural turf marking paint, users should prepare natural turf surfaces by removing old paint with sweep brooms and high-pressure water. If the application is seasonal, no preparation is typically required.

According to Abby McNeal, CSFM, assistant turfgrass manager at Invesco Field at Mile High, you must determine the dimensions that you will be painting before setting up to paint.

“You need to first make a plan as to how you are going to paint the field,” said McNeal. “It is important to take the time to think about it so that you do not track back across painted lines. Gather all of your painting strings, check all of your equipment, and finalize the method of painting with the crew.”

McNeal also recommends having towels on hand in case a spill or mistake happens. A cart with paint (for refilling the machines) should also have a bucket of water and a toolbox with extra tips, nozzles, and miscellaneous tools.

Tools, paint and application

“Tools that we use to paint a football field include strings that are approximately 170 feet long and strings that are 370 feet long,” said McNeal. “We use an 8-inch wide piece of cardboard to make sure we get the gap between the end of the yard line and the sideline. A Graco 9800 Line Lazer is the painting machine that we use. We have it set up so that we can use up to three 150-foot hoses. We are fortunate to use line stencils that are exactly 4 inches wide and 15 feet long, creating a stencil effect when we paint our yard lines. We also have an 8-inch wide stencil to create the goal line.”

Kevin Danksins, senior crew leader of Raymond James Stadium, said he typically mixes paint with water at a 1-to-1 ratio.

McNeal uses World Class paint diluted at a ratio of one part paint to one part water.

Precise field lines are created by running string from end zone to end zone.

Photo courtesy of Suntec Paint, Inc.
"The amount of paint used on a particular day is determined by the event for which we are painting," said McNeal. "We stretch painting out over three days for football. So the day depends on how much paint we use. By the time the field is game day ready, we have used about 25 five-gallon buckets of paint (at the one to one ratio). We want the brightness for television, and this is how we get it."

Dawkins recommends putting down a white background before painting over it with color to provide enhanced brightness.

According to Carbit, when using a compressed air sprayer, adjust reduction with water to obtain a uniform pattern. Use a tank pressure of 100 psi and a fluid pressure of 30 psi. Reduce with water for desired consistency. For a heavy line, reduce with 1 1/2 parts water to one part paint. For remarking, reduce with 2 1/2 parts water to one part paint. When using a gas-operated piston pump sprayer, reduce seven parts water to three parts paint. When using airless spray, reduce 10 percent with water and apply at tip pressure of 2,000-2,500 psi with orifice tip size of .018 inch to .021 inch.

Time to paint
"We start on a Wednesday and finish on a Saturday, and that is two coats of everything," said Dawkins. "If there is a call for rain, we like to find out how much is being called for before it does rain. The paint is dry within an hour and fifteen minutes, so if we get a window like that, we will go ahead and paint, even if it is calling for rain. Rain doesn't damage it too much, unless you put it down right before it rains. Most of the time it leaves some of it there. That way we don't have to go over the whole routine again, we just brighten up what washed off."

For a Sunday NFL game, McNeal also starts on Wednesday with the framing of the field and the outside media lines. Thursdays are for end zones, logos, and the first coat of the 6-foot border. Friday is used to finish the field, yard lines, numbers, hash marks, and another coat on the border. Saturday is used to paint in case weather impacted the painting schedule earlier in the week. Saturday's can also be used to paint one more coat on the border.

"We are always looking at the weather during a game week," said McNeal. "It dictates so much, from tarping to painting, that we must always keep updated as the week progresses."

Carbit recommends applying field paint when air, product and surface temperature are above 50 degrees Fahrenheit and at least 5 degrees Fahrenheit above the dew point. In average weather—77 degrees Fahrenheit, and 50 percent relative humidity—Carbit's paint dries to the touch in 30 minutes, and is hard in one to two hours.

Quality results
"Don't be afraid to experiment with different methods and ways of doing things," said McNeal. "Make your ultimate goal to frame the turf that you spend so much time working on look even better with a great paint job. Use the best paint that you can afford. The cheapest isn't always the best for your turf, so remember to test the paint before you go for the gusto."

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FIELD MARKING PAINT

Zeke's Athletic Paint has taken another step up with ZAP Chiefs Red and ZAP Yellow. Both colors have been reformulated to be brighter and better, says Zeke's. These new colors join an extensive list of stock colors and three levels of ZAP white field marking paint: ZAP Super White, ZAP Pro White and ZAP-I. Zeke's ships all over the country.

Zeke's Athletic Paint/888-430-4076
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MARKING MACHINES & PAINT

Partac/Beam Clay offers a wide line of athletic field marking machines and paints, such as the self-propelled Jiffy 8000 (pictured), and specifically formulated latex paints for turf, such as concentrated Mautz 8-30 used on 32 Super Bowl games, and Mautz Bright White with optical brightness.

Partac/Beam Clay/800-247-2326
For information, circle 151

PAINT STRIPERS

Newstripe's Fielder paint stripers can save you money with their first use by replacing expensive aerosol cans with bulk paint, says the manufacturer. Both models are available as basic units or can be upgraded with power packs to handle the largest fields. Both are backed by 18-month warranty.

Features include: 7- or 12-gal. stainless steel tank; dual handle with control lever; turf specific spray head with 2 to 6 in. adjustable line widths; and optional air, CO2 or engine power packs to eliminate hand-pumping.

Newstripe/800-624-6706
For information, circle 166