

By Bob Tracinski

Flinn Memorial Stadium, the 1996-1997 STMA High School Football Field of the Year, is home for the Quincy High School Blue Devils and the showplace of the Quincy, Illinois, public schools.

The stadium is part of a complex of nearly 25 acres located at the east edge of the city, approximately a mile east of the high school. The stadium's 3,800 seats are routinely filled for both football and soccer games. This spring's graduation ceremonies drew a crowd of



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Flinn Memorial Stadium Wins High School Football Field of the Year

over 6,000, requiring on-field seating for the graduating class and part of the audience.

Futuristic Complex

When the complex was developed in 1978, this forward-thinking, sports-minded community built an extremely workable stadium on the "home team" side of the football-soccer game field. The lower level of the concrete building houses three team locker rooms, one official's locker room, two offices for coaches, a team meeting room, training room, large weight room and an equipment room. On the upper level are two concession stands, men's and women's rest rooms, two large equipment storage rooms and the sports turf manager's office. On top of the stadium is the ample press box with room for three radio stations, press room, video room, two football coaches rooms, a scout room, and a room for the PA announcer and score keeper.

Even more impressive was the installation of a sand-based field able to support the heavy use to come. This field has an extensive sub-surface network of drainage tiles spaced on six-foot centers that leads from the field into the man-made collection pond on site. The in-ground automatic irrigation system was designed with six individual zones and 27 heads. A polyurethane six-lane, all-weather

running track surrounds the field.

The complex includes three football practice fields and a dual soccer-football field for non-varsity games. A video tower for taping practices is located between the practice fields.

Hooked on Maintenance

Maintenance of this multi-functional facility is managed by sports turf manager Kurt Knuf, who has been in that role since 1985.

"I'm assisted by two college students during the summer, generally from about mid-May to the middle of August," Knuf says. "They help with the general cleaning of the building, mowing and trimming of the three practice fields, the main football field and the other surrounding areas."

"These students have been great assistants over the years. Todd Reagan is in his fourth year here and does an excellent job. My son, Jason, worked with us in 1996. Casey Otten is tackling the assignment this summer. It helps to balance a first-year person with an experienced one. This job takes more focus than the average summer job, including a desire to learn, attention to detail and the commitment to do things right day after day."

It also takes intense organization on Knuf's part to keep all the fields mowed, painted and safe for play at all



Before every football game, Knuf overseeds the field, letting the players "cleat it in." Photos courtesy: Kurt Knuf.

times. Organization is especially important because, during the remainder of the year, he's a one-man crew. He does have a full-time, though non-salaried, staff member. It's Sunshine, the cat who is in charge of rodent control.

Knuf earned an associate degree in civil engineering and worked for a time as a surveyor in Galena, Illinois, before returning to his home town of Quincy. He originally took the school position as a way of combining his love of sports and the outdoors while waiting for a surveying position to open up locally.

"The challenge of this position had me hooked during the first year," he says. "It's just what I was meant to do."

Knuf reports that his wife, Susan, does laugh about the "Mr. Turf" title given him by the local TV sports editor, but as business manager for a local

company, she understands the need to do what it takes to get the job done and is very supportive.

Knuf has found his engineering background an asset in such precise tasks as field layout and marking and in irrigation system maintenance. He continually works to upgrade his job-related knowledge and skills and holds a public applicator turf-pest control license with the state of Illinois.

Opportunities to Shine

"Scheduling maintenance can be difficult," Knuf says, "because of the number of games played here. Football plays 11 to 13 games in the fall. Boys soccer plays 23 to 25 games during the same period and on the same field. In addition, the varsity and sophomore teams practice on the main field every Thursday night to get ready for their Friday night's game."

"The marching band plays for the home varsity football games. They also will practice on the game field once before the first home football game and occasionally before important competitions. Last year we hosted a marching band competition on the field that brought in eight other bands, one all the way from Columbia, Missouri."

Two soccer games took place on the field during the same day that the band competition was held, but Knuf said it created no problems.

"The field was in great shape going into it and came through just fine," he says. "I thought the band competition was terrific and hope they make it an annual event."

Speaking of annual events, the field is the site of 18 to 20 girls soccer games each spring; boys and girls high



Applying a growth regulator for the first time last year, Knuf has cut back on field painting, which used to be a weekly project.

school track practices and meets; the Great River Golden Games for senior citizens; the Catholic grade school's track field day; the Special Olympics; the public school's fifth-grade field day; the Junior High Regional Track Meet, which pulls in around 1,000 people; and high school graduation.

"I look forward to graduation," Knuf says. "Even though the stage is

on the field for a week, if the weather cooperates at all, the turf snaps back very well. It's really a great opportunity for our facility to shine for the segment of the community that's not into sports."

Besides, Knuf points out, the field has been even busier. Up until the city's Notre Dame Catholic High School built its own field four years

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7. Does baseball field have lighting for night games?
8. Number of events on baseball diamond per year.
9. Types and number of events on diamond other than baseball?
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ago, Flinn Stadium hosted 52 games each fall instead of the current 35. Because everyone cooperated and communicated, the field held its own then, too.

Providing Top-Level Turf

Before every football game, Knuf overseeds the field with the same 60

percent bluegrass, 40 percent perennial ryegrass blend as the existing turf and lets the players "cleat it in." The only bare spots that ever appear are along the sidelines where the football players gather to watch the action, and even those bare spots are rare.

When Friday night football games are followed by Saturday soccer games, he'll enhance the normal post-



Developed almost 20 years ago, Flinn Memorial Stadium's construction included a sand-based field to support the heavy use to come.

Q: What do all of these teams have in common?

Oakland A's
Arizona Diamondbacks
University of Texas Longhorns
San Diego Chargers
University of Southern California Trojans
California Angels
Arizona State University Sun Devils
San Francisco 49'ers
San Diego State University Aztecs
San Francisco Giants
San Diego Padres
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game divot replacement by rolling the field on Saturday morning.

"I very seldom roll the field otherwise," explains Knuf. "It's basically a step needed to ensure the smooth surface the soccer players expect from our field."

Consistency in irrigation is the biggest problem Knuf faces. It's not a fault in the irrigation design but rather the effects of the constant, every-changing winds that sweep across the open expanse of turf. A day with no wind changing the spray pattern gets marked on his calendar. He fights the isolated dry spots with two oscillating sprinklers and 400 feet of hose.

Offsetting the sand-based field's constant thirst for irrigation is its excellent drainage. The field is ready for Friday night play following a normal rain on Thursday night or even late Friday morning.

Since the complex's practice fields lack installed irrigation, two Rain Trains travel almost constantly when conditions are hot and dry. Knuf schedules the majority of all field irrigation at night when both winds and evaporation rates are more favorable.

Knuf practices standard IPM methods, using control products only as necessary. Because of the high irrigation needs, he monitors nitrogen levels closely to avoid dollar spot and reduce fungicide applications. Constant winds also bring in weed seeds, so a spring preventive application of pre-emergence control is part of the maintenance program.

Fields are mowed three times per week. The football game field is mowed each Monday, Wednesday and Friday with a reel mower. Each five-yard section is mowed in an alternat-

ing cross-field direction, with directions switched at each mowing.

Knuf starts painting the football game field in August. It used to be a weekly process, but he added Primo growth regulator for the first time last year with excellent results.

"I'm very proud of all 25 acres of this beautiful facility," he says, "and especially of Flinn Memorial Stadium. Yes, there are 60-hour work weeks at times, with bursts up to 80 hours during the spring and fall, and with multi-use facilities, there can be lots of different agendas to satisfy. But the satisfaction of providing top-level turf that players, coaches, officials and spectators all rave about more than makes up for it. I wish every high school athlete could play on fields like this one."

Bob Tracinski is manager of public relations for John Deere in Raleigh, N.C., and public relations co-chair for the national Sports Turf Managers Association.

Flinn Stadium Football Field Maintenance Program

Month	Week	Procedure
March	4th	Core aerate and drag in cores
April	1st	Apply Par Ex Starter Fertilizer (10-18-22)
April	2nd	Apply Scotts Turf Weedgrass Control (pre-emergence)
May	1st	Apply Noburn Wetting Agent (6oz/1,000 sq ft)
May	2nd	Spray Triamine Weed Control (post-emergence broadleaf)
May	3rd	Apply Merit Insecticide and fertilizer
May	4th	Spray Ferromec Iron
June	2nd	Aerate (deep slice)
June	3rd	Apply Noburn Wetting Agent (3oz/1,000 sq ft)
June	4th	Apply Par Ex Fertilizer (32-3-8 at half rate)
July	3rd	Apply Noburn Wetting Agent (3oz/1,000 sq ft)
July	4th	Apply Par Ex Fertilizer (32-3-8 at half rate)
August	3rd	Apply Noburn Wetting Agent (3oz/1,000 sq ft)
August	4th	Apply Triumph Insecticide (if needed for grubs)
August	4th	Apply Par Ex Fertilizer (32-3-8 at full rate)
September	4th	Spray Ferromec Iron
November	1st	Core aerate and drag in cores
November	2nd	Core aerate and drag in cores
November	2nd	Topdress with sifted sand (every two years)
November	2nd	Apply Par Ex Winterizer Fertilizer (24-4-12)

Other:

- Seed worn areas before games
- Spray for diseases as needed: Banner Preventive, Chipco 26019, Echo



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