



## Soccer Disney Style

The soccer fields at Disney's Wide World of Sports complex were designed to promote superior athletic performance, with just a touch of magic.

by Lesa Morey

The best-known icon gracing the 200-acre Disney Wide World of Sports complex, in Lake Buena Vista, FL, may be its spectacular, nostalgic-themed ballpark. But the five multi-purpose soccer fields actually see some of the heaviest action—by players representing every level from world class athletes to amateur high schoolers.

When Disney set out to transform part of a cattle pasture into a group of soccer fields, the entertainment giant began in the typical Disney way—it used loads of professional advice, loads of money, and loads of dirt. The idea being to promote superior athletic performance.

From the get-go, Disney's overriding design goal was to provide its soccer players with a superior playing field that could inspire athletes to give the best performances of their lives, and yearn to return to play again.

"From the players' standpoint, we wanted that (personal best performance) to be part of the thrill—to be able to go home and say 'I can't believe the soccer field we just played on,'" says David Muenks, Director of Resorts and Facilities Development, and a member of Disney's famous creative team of designers and engineers, its Imagineers.

Disney's new soccer fields didn't just have to be good. They had to elicit a "Wow!" from the soccer players.

Reggie Williams, president of Disney's Sports Group, issued his orders to the Imagineers: find out who would be playing the fields, find out their expectations, and then exceed those expectations. In addition,



Disney's Wide World of Sports complex, located at Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, FL, is spread over 200 acres. The complex hosts more than 150 professional and amateur events each year in more than 30 sports.

tion, the concept they came up with had to accommodate a multitude of audiences—the athletes themselves, the thousands of spectators expected to line the fields, and the millions of television broadcast viewers watching international competitors from around the world.

A heady assignment, for sure. These weren't going to be your average fields. Even the Imagineers, with decades of award-winning park development experience behind them, had never before built sports fields, with their exacting guidelines. "We had no in-house expertise," concedes Muenks.

So, they went out and got what they needed. M.A. Mortinson, a Minnesota construction management firm that has built other big sports facilities, loaned its staff of experts, who served as an extension

of the Imagineers' team of construction managers. They brought in Orlando landscape architect Herbert Halback, and Dallas architect HKS.

The Toro Co., now the "official" turf and irrigation company of the Walt Disney World Resort, provided turf consultant Dr. James Watson. Another turf consultant, Murray Cook, pitched in too.

"It was critical to get the right people on the team," recalls Rob Hale, Senior Construction Manager, who plays soccer himself and was a big proponent of the soccer fields.

Key players traveled to examine other facilities. Auxiliary buildings, they knew, could be as creative as the Imagineers wanted. The playing fields had to be top-notch and exact, of course. But the turf also had to be



The five soccer fields at Disney's Wide World of Sports complex utilize Tifway 419 bermudagrass. The same turf crowns were used not only on all the complex's soccer and other athletic fields, but also on its non-playing surfaces.

capable of taking a beating under everyday use, for weeks at a time, and all the while look good to the all-seeing television cameras, which

can broadcast every week.

The designers knew the fields had to pull this all off in the face of

Central Florida's notorious afternoon downpours. The fields had to be capable of handling heavy water loads, and be ready for play in just 30 minutes, even after the occasional 8- to 10-inch cloudburst.

Fortunately, the old cow pasture proved to be an excellent site, with good soil conditions. Although much of Disney's extensive property holdings don't sit on the best-drained land, the soccer fields site straddles some deep upland soils—the remnants of ancient sand dunes and beaches that form the "ridge" running up and down the spine of peninsular Florida.

Although these granular soils are generally well-drained, they could also harbor a high water table. "We made the decision early on to address the potential drainage problem," says Hale. "Anywhere from 3-6 feet of soil had to be trucked in, to raise the playing fields high enough above the native water table."



Baseball infield covers come in standard and custom sizes



Full size covers for football and soccer are readily available

## Ultimate Field Cover Protection

Manufactured in North America, COVERMASTER® covers are made from the widest available materials to limit the number of seams and can be custom designed to your requirements. We also offer the widest range of colors in the industry.

With more than three decades of experience and our commitment to achieve complete customer satisfaction, COVERMASTER® field covers are recommended by more groundskeepers than any other.

### Ultimate Field Cover Handling

The TARP MACHINE™ (left photo). Attached to any 14 HP tractor equipped with a PTO, it rolls the cover on and off the field in a minimum of time.

The TARPMATE™ (right photo) stores any size cover. Strong and lightweight, the 28" diameter plastic roller is complete with safety end caps and is available in three standard lengths.



CALL FOR OUR FREE VIDEO

**COVERMASTER™**  
**COVERMASTER**  
**COVERMASTER**  
 MASTERS IN THE ART OF SPORTS SURFACE COVERS

CALL TOLL FREE  
 1-800-387-5808

VISIT OUR WEB SITE!  
[www.covermaster.com](http://www.covermaster.com)  
 E-MAIL: [info@covermaster.com](mailto:info@covermaster.com)

### CUSTOMER FEEDBACK...

- From 1-10, your company is a 10...  
 Jim Simmons, Facility Mgr., Buckingham Little League, Ft. Myers, FL
- Great service... the best...  
 Chip Baker, Asst. Baseball Coach Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL
- Experience with Covermaster has been outstanding... appreciate special attention...  
 Ray Tanner, Head Baseball Coach, Univ. of South Carolina, Columbia, SC
- Excellent quality with competitive prices...  
 Johnson Bowie, Associate AD, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA
- Covermaster takes extra step to meet customer's exact needs...  
 Gay Mayse, Asst. Gen. Mgr., Wisconsin Timber Rattlers, Appleton, WI
- Response time was great... recommended by groundskeeper of St. Louis Cardinals...  
 David Hopkins, Alton American Legion Baseball, Alton, IL
- Very good... highly recommended...  
 Dunham Wright, Facilities Supervisor, Northeast Louisiana Univ., Monroe, LA
- Delivered in perfect condition... best product I looked at...  
 John Milardo, Supt. of Parks, City of Middleton, Middleton, CT



COVERMASTER INC., 100 WESTMORE DR. 11-D, REXDALE, ON, M9V 5C3 TEL 416-745-1811 FAX 416-742-6837

Circle 107 on Inquiry Card.

Knowing that flat fields don't drain well, they lasered a "virtually flat" field, giving just a half-degree slope to promote drainage. Just underneath the surface they applied a 10-inch-thick, custom-mixed layer of rootzone soil. Before any truckload of mix was dumped, Disney tested every load for consistency.

The rootzone mix of sand and Dakota peat had to be just right. "It was key for the rootzone soil to promote water drainage but still hold enough water and soil nutrients," notes Hale. Coming up with just the right balance proved to be tricky. "We wanted to keep the right amount of moisture in the rootzone," he adds, "so we wouldn't have to be irrigating a lot. Water conservation is important."

On the other hand, the fields had to be in prime shape in the morning following nighttime irrigation. The entire drainage system involved the rootzone mix, several feet of sand base, plus underground drains.

Holding it all together, of course, is the turf. The consultants agreed on the sprigging of Tifway 419 bermudagrass. The same turf crowns were used not only on all the complex's soccer and other athletic fields, but also on its non-playing surfaces.

Reliance on just the one turf variety not only ties the complex together visually, but helps with the overall turf maintenance schedule, while substantially reducing the risk of contaminating the turf with other varieties of grass, Hale points out.

The idea here is that "it looks like a sports field, no matter where you look," Muenks says. "It's quite a sight to stand on a high point and look out over a plane of green, tree-lined and manicured fields linked by walkways, with fieldhouses rising in the background."

The uniform look "creates a memory, really" says Muenks, who still marvels at the "sense of place" that's created by visitors who, upon leaving the parking

lot and becoming pedestrians, are directed to a grand set of steps. Crowds scaling these steps strikes Muenks as something like "a procession." At the top of the steps, visitors catch their first glimpse of the green-capped complex. At that point there is, he says, "a sense of arrival."

For the athletes, however, the proof is in the playing. The design of the soccer fields contributes to players competing at their highest-possible level, Hale says. Their placement and orientation, the fast-draining and healthy turf, and its spectator-friendly mobile seating—which can accommodate up to 10,000 fans at a time—give every athlete the best competitive advantage.

To Hale, the successful design of Disney's soccer fields boils down to three fundamental principles—identify your target audience, find out what you don't know and hire the best people possible to make the decisions.

*Lesa Morey is a commercial horticultural writer based in Sebring, FL.*



Tiftway Sports, Inc. with over 12 years of experience in athletic field construction and renovation. For your Turnkey Athletic field solution. Please call Today!



Tiftway Sports, Inc.  
912-567-2380

Circle 108 on Inquiry Card.

## Jaydee Drive Liner



The Jaydee Drive Liner is a self-propelled riding line marker. The 35-gallon paint tank carries enough marking material for a complete game field, or several practice fields. The 2-gallon flush tank cleans the discharge lines for work breaks, travel, or overnight. The center or side-mark spray shields are always operator-visible. A nearly zero turning radius reduces or eliminates back and turn maneuvers.

## Jaydee Equipment Company

202 East Joliet Highway, Box 278  
New Lenox, IL 60451-0278  
TOLL FREE: 1-800-443-3268  
jaydee@theramp.net • www.jaydeeeqco.com

Circle 109 on Inquiry Card.