



ASA boasts showcase field

The Amateur Softball Association's Don E. Porter Hall of Fame Stadium, a four-field facility in Oklahoma City, won the 2005 Sports Turf Managers Association's College Softball Field of the Year Award. Sports turf superintendent Rick Neville accepted the award at last month's STMA Conference.

The main field and Field #2 were built in 1987 and two more fields were added 3 years ago. That project included construction of the Hall of Fame Plaza and Sports Festival Esplanade, a 300-foot long, 40-foot wide walkway that features vendor tents and fan activities during the Big XII Conference Championship and NCAA Women's College World Series. ASA has hosted the latter event 13 times and will again in 2006. The main field also sees action in two NAIA invitational tournaments, a national junior college regional, as well as host home games for Oklahoma City University.

Also, last July the stadium was home of the inaugural World Cup of Softball, an international event that featured five of the world's best national teams. Nearly 200 games were played on Field 1 alone last year.

After Neville took over last January, a soil analysis showed that the main field's skin consisted of 60% sand, 10% silt, and 30% clay mix. Vitrified clay is added as needed to the infield skin to provide for a safe buffer layer on top of the infield mix. (Calcined clay is added to the pitcher's circle and then lightly watered before games.) Neville overseeded with a perennial ryegrass mix (Playmate) in February, which previously had not been done, resulting in his having to battle poa annua.

All fields feature automated irrigation systems and lighting by Musco. The systems have seven zones and 30 heads in the outfield alone; irrigation was added to the wing areas last July before a resodding.

FIELD OF THE YEAR



Quick connect valves also were added in foul territories behind first and third bases for infield skin watering (rather than on the warning track). Newville reports he'll be replacing the warning track this winter from a fine chat gravel to a less abrasive material (from Stabilizer Solutions).

World Series work

The women's College World Series presents challenges, Newville says. The first is fully prepping the field in a 10-minute window. "We rake out the chalked lines, drag the field, rebuild the pitcher's circle and home plate areas, double-mark all chalk lines, and water the skin," he says.

The second challenge comes after ESPN and everyone else that shows up for the WS has left, and that's resurrecting the turf. Beyond the temporary fence set up for fast-pitch games are the camera lifts, temporary bleachers, temporary restrooms, and VIP loungers, which are really just tractor-trailer rigs. All these items are on the turf for one week, Newville says.

For 2006

"We will be a bit less aggressive with top-dressing on two of the fields as they are currently to our desired level of playability," Newville says. "We will topdress in conjunction with core aeration to amend the soil. We will be more aggressive with verticutting as we observed a significant improvement in the Bermuda growth rate after verticutting applications.

"We will also incorporate more controlled released fertilizers as our schedule this year will not allow as much time between events for some cultural practices."

He adds, "We will be acquiring a Jacobsen bed-mount topdresser and a Jacobsen TracAire aerator from Luber Brothers of Oklahoma City."

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What are his keys to keeping the infield skin safe and playable through all the games and activities on his fields?

"There are many aspects to maintaining a safe and playable infield. We try to keep our skins as firm as possible with a 1/4-inch of vitrified clay amendment on top. The amendment we used last year had a lot of fines in it, which was good as it helped amend our loose soils," says Newville. "This year we will incorporate a Stabilizer Solution product into our infield skins, and use a vitrified amendment with uniform particle sizing.

"Moisture is the single most important factor in maintaining a safe skin. We have installed the Rain Bird E-115 rotary heads (with turf covers) behind the pitching circles so that we can be efficient in maintaining moisture levels in the skin during our tournaments when field prep time is at a minimum. These heads will be removed for all televised events," Newville says.

"I think the greatest pleasure, as with most jobs, is seeing the results of one's hard work and effort," says Newville. "The positive feedback from coaches, players, and the NCAA is also quite a motivator to continue my education and provide the best surfaces we can.

What about the flip side? "Our inflated schedule is allowing less time between events for some cultural practices to be as consistent as I would like, but we just have to evolve with the schedule and make alterations in our maintenance programs," says Newville.

Equipment

The stadium field, along with Fields 3 and 4, are mowed with a Jacobsen 1880 fairway mower with groomers. Field 2 is mowed with a Ransomes t-plex 185d. Core aeration is done with a Ryan Greensaire 24 walk-behind. Verticutting is done via a Jake hydraulic 214 machine, provided by Luber Brothers of Oklahoma City. Use of a topdresser is obtained by trading out equipment with a local minor league organization.

The STMA Field of the Year Awards Program has been made possible through the generous support of its sponsors. They include Bayer; Carolina Green; Covermaster; Hunter Industries; Jacobsen, A Textron Co.; Nu-Gro; Turface Athletics/Profile Products; Turf Seed; West Coast Turf; and World Class Athletic Surfaces. ■

Maintenance Plan

January-February: Reconstruction and renovation of skin areas. Reset plates, pitching rubbers, and bases. Overseed with perennial rye blend at 10-lb/1000 sq. ft. rate.

March: Fertilize with 17-5-9 10% S at a rate of 1/2-lb N/1000 sq. ft. every 2 weeks. Mow as needed. Height of cut is 7/8 inches.

April-May: Core aerate with 1/2-inch diameter tines. Topdress at a 1/4-inch rate with washed sand. Make post-emergent herbicide as needed following standard IPM practices. Lightly verticut once each month. Fertilize with 17-5-9 10% S at a rate of 1/2 lb N/1000 sq. ft. Every 2 weeks. Wash lips every 2 weeks. Mow daily at a height of 3/4 inches.

June: Core aerate. Topdress at a 1/4-inch rate with washed sand. Lightly verticut. Fertilize with 21-7-14 at a rate of 1/2 lb N/1000 sq. ft. every 2 weeks. Mow daily at 3/4 inches. Wash lips every 2 weeks.

July: Core aerate wings. Lower height of cut to 5/8 inches. Mow daily. Fertilize with 21-7-14 N at 1/2 lb/1000 sq. ft. Fertilize with 0-0-61 at a 1 lb rate of K. Lightly verticut. Topdress at a 1/4 inch rate. Wash lips every 2 weeks.

August: Core aerate wings. Fertilize twice with 17-5-0 10% S at a rate of 1/2 lb N/1000 sq. ft. Mow daily with height of cut raised to 3/4 inch. Wash lips every 2 weeks.

September: Core aerate wings. Fertilize twice with 17-5-9 10% S at a rate of 1/2 lb. N/1000 sq. ft. Mow daily. Wash lips every 2 weeks. Raise HOC to 7/8 inch.

October: Core aerate wings. Fertilize with 18-24-12 at a rate of 1 lb phosphorus/1000 sq. ft. Overseed with perennial ryegrass at a rate of 8 lb/1000 sq. ft. Topdress at a 1/4-inch rate. Mow as needed.

November-December: Mow as needed. Take on any reconstruction/renovation projects.



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