

Christian Academy of Louisville wins Schools/Parks Football Field of the Year



Centurion Field at the Christian Academy of Louisville won the 2007 STMA Schools/Parks Football Field of the Year. Andy Davis, 2-year horticulture degree from Western Kentucky is turf and grounds manager for the Christian Academy of Louisville School System and his assistant is Chris Miller.

As many of you know, 2007 was a disaster in the transition zone for bermudagrass. Davis says he had only 20% coverage on the football field at the beginning of growing season. The field sits on a hill, unshaded by trees or buildings, and so is at the mercy of the weather.



FIELD OF THE YEAR



Davis decided to re-seed using Transcontinental, which he said established quickly, was a good color match for what he had, and the price fit his budget. Total renovation began June 5, with aeration, verticutting, and broadcast seed and a starter fertilizer added.

Campus construction projects limited Davis' use of water. "Our irrigation main line was broken 7 times through the construction," he says. Track renovations also hampered irrigation efforts. After another system breakdown, Davis had to water the football field by hand with a 1-inch hose three or four times a day! Sheesh!

Davis had enough pull to get the first game pushed back 2 weeks. The first game was played by the 5th and 6th graders August 18, just over 2 months from seeding. The sidelines were thin but a local university donated sideline covers to help out that situation.

SportsTurf: What kind of grass do you have and what are your keys for maintaining it so well?

Davis: Our field is seeded with Transcontinental bermudagrass. After an extreme case of winterkill, I decided to renovate with a hardier variety that was still reasonably priced for our budget. The thing I liked about Transcontinental was the quick establishment and its cold tolerance. This was very important for our site.

Our field sits on an elevated area and receives a great deal of wind year round. The site receives little blockage from trees or buildings so having a cultivar that could survive the play as well as the elements was very important. During the growing season we try to push the field as much as possible. We have a granular and bi-weekly liquid fertilization plan in place and we are mowing almost daily. Soil cultivation is done as often as possible during the summer months.

Once the season starts in late August we don't have a lot of time left between games for aggressive maintenance practices. We have

3 high school teams, 2 middle school teams and 1 elementary school team that use our field for over 30 games from late August to the first of November.

Also scheduled are weekly walk-throughs for our varsity team and the occasional band practice. The field has to be in top shape at the beginning of the season to make it through the schedule. We try to push our program hard until about mid-September and then raise the cutting height and reduce fertilization when cold weather starts to enter the forecast. Thus far, we've had great luck with our program. Even with the winterkill this past year and having to renovate before the season started we were able to provide a good stand of turf throughout the season. I accredit that to having a good maintenance plan in place and relying on the help and input from area turf managers. I especially want to thank my assistant Chris Miller for his dedication and long hours to make this award possible.

ST: What's your logo painting process? What have you found that works best, in either products or techniques or both?

Davis: We will paint the field the week before the first game and repeat the process weekly throughout the season. The logo and end-zones will typically only be painted during the week of varsity home games. We have a stencil for our center logo and it is very easy to lay out and get on the field. The end-zones, however, are laid out by hand. First, the design is drawn out on paper and then transferred to the field. We have begun using a higher quality of turf paint to get longer lasting color on our lines and logos.

Another thing that has worked well for us as far as maintaining the paint on the field is the use of growth regulators in our turf management program. When we are mowing 4-5 times per week and sometimes having 3-4 games per week, the lines can become faint. With a small crew and limited budget, it's hard from a cost and labor standpoint to paint more than once a week. The money

spent on the growth regulator has more than paid for itself as far as us being able to provide a perfectly striped field for all games without sacrificing time and quality.

ST: What's the best piece of turf management advice you've ever received?

Davis: There are a ton of people that I owe a great amount of gratitude to for helping me along in my sports turf career. It's hard to single out one piece of advice. However, there is one thing that has definitely stuck with me and is always in use when I am on a field. "A good groundskeeper always walks with his head down."

Tom Nielsen of the Louisville Bats has been one of the most influential guys in my career. This statement of his from years ago has become a part of my subconscious in my daily work: "There is always something to be seen in your turf. One small area on a field can potentially tell of stressed turf, disease, nutrient deficiencies or a number of signs that hopefully can prevent larger problems." It's funny that the statement has stuck with me so long. I think I share the same outlook as most turf managers; we take a tremendous amount of pride in our work and feel that there is always something more that can be done.

ST: How do you keep your "engine" charged to do your best every day?

Davis: During the busy part of the season it's sometimes difficult to keep motivated. We maintain 14 acres of sports turf

as well as about 50 acres of grounds around the athletic facility and school buildings with a crew of three. However, I would not trade this profession for any other. I've always had an outdoor job and cannot see that changing in the near future.

I think most turf managers would agree that there are always improvements that can be made. There is always a new technique or product to try. There is always something that can be done to sure up the safety of the field or give it just a little bit more aesthetically pleasing look. I think the biggest satisfaction I get from my job is climbing to the press box on our football field. It is centrally located and from this spot you can see almost every field. There is nothing more pleasing than seeing a freshly mowed and painted field. Just this quiet time surveying the facility and taking in the satisfaction that comes from a job well done keeps me going.

ST: How do you balance work and personal life?

Davis: My wife, Amy, and our two sons, Jake and Will, are very supportive of my career. My oldest attends school on the same campus and calls himself my "Jr. Groundskeeper." Every afternoon after school he is quick to my shop to help out with whatever is on the agenda for the day. He even has his own locker in my office. One of the boys' favorite activities if I work late is to come and run through the sprin-

klers if the irrigation happens to be on. I guess you can call that a perk if you are 7 or 3 years old. There are often long hours and weekends, but the support of my family allows me to be able to concentrate while at work and devote my time to the family when at home. During the winter months I try to catch up on things around the house and yard, as well as take a much needed vacation.

ST: What steps do you take to ensure the field drains well? Or, what system is installed?

Davis: Our field profile is a heavy clay so it does not drain exceptionally well. The field is crowned and there are storm drains on the edge of the field but no real drainage system. I try to aerate heavily and topdress at least once a month when the turf is actively growing. This past year we were able to purchase a turf sweeper. My plan for the future is to harvest the cores after we aerate and before topdressing. Anything I can do to alleviate soil compaction and increase water percolation will benefit the turf for not only drainage but root development. ■

The STMA Field of the Year Awards Program has been made possible through the generous support of its sponsors. They include Carolina Green; Covermaster; Hunter Industries; Turface Athletics/Profile Products; Scotts Turf Seed; and World Class Athletic Surfaces.

Christian Academy of Louisville Monthly Maintenance Program

January

Root fertilization, _ lb. K/1,0002

February

Apply post-emergent

March

Paint field for spring game

April

Apply post-emergent

Starter fertilization, 1 lb. N/1,0002

May

Aerification in two directions

Cores pulverized

Topdress with 25 tons fine grade sand

Mow as needed

June

Aerification in four directions

Verticut in two directions

Seed with Transcontinental bermudagrass, 2 lbs./1,0002

Starter fertilization, 1 lb. N/1,0002

Liquid fertilization with growth regulator,

_ lb. N/1,0002 weekly

Mow 4-5 times weekly

July

Aerification in two directions

Verticut in two directions

Slow release fertilization, 1 lb. N/1,0002

Liquid fertilization, post-emergent, growth regulator, _ lb. N/1,0002 weekly

Mow daily

August

Aerification in two directions

Verticut in two directions

Topdress with 25 tons fine grade sand

Liquid fertilization with growth regulator, _ lb. N/1,0002 weekly

Mow daily

Paint field once a week

September

Slow release fertilization, 1 lb. N/1,0002

Mow daily

Paint field once a week

October

Mow daily

Paint field once a week

November

Mow as needed

Root fertilization, _ lb. K/1,0002

Apply post-emergent

December

Soil test