



Athletic Field Design

Preparing your field for record breaking rain

By Mike Hebrard, Athletic Field Design

The pitcher wipes off his glasses and checks the signs, (is that three fingers or does one finger have a glob of mud on it). He slides his foot set, spits off the rain drop that has fallen off the bill of his hat and delivers the pitch with pin point accuracy. His landing foot slides to a gradual stop allowing his body to land gently in front of the mound. The ball eventually breaks through the intermittent splashes of rainfall and approaches the batter that has just found a firm area of saturated mud to plant his back foot. He swings gallantly up at the ball in hopes of ending the game with a grand slam as the evening and end of the seventh approach. The ball squirts off the bat high into the clouds, comes crashing to the soggy turf in left center and the left & center fielder collide. The shortstop instinctively squeezes the mud soaked horsehide, wheels and throws wildly to 1st base. The right fielder hastily slopes through the lake in right field narrowly missing several content ducks. The ball is lobbed in the direction of 1st base, the pitcher, who is instinctively covering on the play in hopes of not allowing the winning run to score, scoops the ball out of the puddle, slips and falls on 1st base, while looking for the batter. He rises to his knees in despair noticing that the batter is only 5' out of the batter's box before slipping down in pure disgust. The game is finally over. Does that sound familiar from this past season with no apparent hopes of improving weather? Well how about some quick preventative grounds keeping tips to help prepare you and your field after this record breaking rainfall of '96.

1) Don't till or spike your dirt unless you can pack & seal it back the same day. By opening the dirt, any potential rain fall will recede deeper into the ground, thus making a deeper mud bath.

2) Sorry if your plans were to add 50 yrs. of dirt to the low spots, I wish you had done that in the brief fall, you're taking chances that adding that amount of fill and packing it before the 4 pm monsoons fall is risky.

3) Start with homeplate and the pitchers mound, keep the low spots filled and packed thus preventing rain from settling in and saturating the main play areas of the game. After packing those areas cover them with any type of tarp or mat. This will keep the erosion of the rain from destroying your perfectly groomed space.

4) Don't take batting practice on your game field. Many of you already abide by this rule. During batting practice, 100's of balls hit the turf in front of home plate, doing a great deal of damage to a critical part of the field. Cover that area with netting or old tarps if you still insist on practicing there. It is not a good idea to move back into the backstop either as this creates unneeded wear in both the batter area and practice pitcher area.

5) Mark off a practice diamond in the outfield, maybe even using an existing foul line to begin your alignment.

6) Watch during a rain storm to see if the water is coming from another area or is trapped from draining off because of the grass lip. By digging small trenches while it is raining you can eliminate much of the standing water before you get on the field.

7) Remove as much standing water as possible before adding Turface MVP or

dragging. Don't sweep water onto the grass. That just builds bigger lips. Do pump, scoop, trench, blow to dryer areas with a backpack blower, sponge & bucket or other methods.

8) Lightly rake the dirt, this will allow any wind or sun light to dry the dirt more quickly. By raking deeper any potential rain fall with soak in deeper.

9) If time and labor are available, remove deep mud areas and fill with dry dirt & pack. If the dirt is packed, the water will run off more rapidly, not given as much of a chance to soak in. It is also a huge advantage to have dry dirt covered near the field. It doesn't do you much good to have dry dirt 1000' away and the game needs to start in 45min.

10) Keep the tractors, ATV, Asst. Coaches New \$20,000 4 x 4 pickup off the field, this will only create more problems, but at least some other time your coach can show off that the 4x4 can get him out of the wet turf in the infield. Stay on top when working on wet dirt, stay off except trenching when it is raining, any foot marks you create will put a low spot in the mud trapping more water.

11) Try to get as much water running off the dirt as possible. I prefer to run it under the backstop, especially on softball fields. Try to keep dugouts dry with gravel or cinder, with the water running away from traffic. You can spend a lot of time in a wet dugout; you don't need to get wet shoes too.

12) I like to use a field dryer additive such as Turface Quick Dry, when there are 2 Teams & 2 Umpires. This product works and will dry a puddle up in almost no time, but it can be expensive and leave a different color. I use Turface MVP as much as possible in wet weather, but only on the top portion of the dirt. Remember the Turface MVP is also used to prevent compaction as

13) Plan ahead, involve grounds people, Athletic Directors, parents & professional people when making these choices. Remember by putting too many rock heads together you can form a rock pile. The saying is "the squeaky wheel gets the grease" I add to that by saying, "if it squeaks too much you replace the wheel". So just like any athletic contest, position your best players where most of the action is likely to happen. The same goes for working on the field. The parents that are around a lot of professional people could be your contact for heading up donations or borrowing equipment that is needed for field improvement, your hardest worker has the best rake, the parent with knack of remembering and good with numbers, and you have to get the lunches for the work party.

14) Don't burn volunteers out. Be in charge, don't try and do too much in one day. Rent or hire equipment instead of using 50 people to move dirt with shovels. That time might be better spent raising funds or improving an existing area. Schedule working shifts, underclassmen in the morning, upperclassmen in the afternoon. Do the labor intensive work on practice days and the cosmetic work on game days.