



Athletic Field Design

Spring Training For Fields

By Mike Hebrard, Athletic Field Design

Everyone is thoroughly convinced that in order to prepare our selves for the upcoming baseball season, we need to work out before the actual tryouts and season start. How much good does it do to hit grounds balls and take batting practice on gym floors if we neglect the surface that our players have to perform on, after receiving all of that professional instruction during the winter. Our winter weather has taken its toll on both the turf as well as the dirt, and we need to address those problems with the limited budget and manpower we have available. Here are some guidelines to follow to help your fields to prepare for the upcoming season.

1) First, check with your grounds person to see what you can or can't do on the field. Some leagues and schools play on city parks and may not allow you under any circumstances to do anything but chalk the field. Schedule a meeting with the person in charge, take notes and express your concerns to make the field as safe and playable as possible for your team.

2) Find out if there is any thing that you and your team can do on the field that would make his job easier. Believe it or not there nothing in your teaching contract as a coach that states that you have to maintain the baseball field. Some times the littlest task can put you in good favor with the person in charge on the field. Most grounds department have a scheduled maintenance program they intend to perform on the field and don't what

to duplicate that effort. It is also getting harder to fertilize on your own, because the district is libel for any harm that results from improper application.

3) Remove lips around grass edges, sweep, hose, rake, sod cut or use a powered thatcher.

4) Use a walk behind mower to mow the infield and foul grass, a riding mower can leave rut or mud on the grass from driving over the base lines. A minimum twice a week during the season is recommended. Don't cut off more than a 1/3rd of the grass blade at one time and make sure that the blade is sharp. If you use a reel mower take in, to have it professionally sharpened.

5) Before you renovate the turf grass, mow the grass as short as possible and remove the clippings, mark any irrigation heads or utilities before using renovation equipment. By aerating the infield in a circle, starting around the mound, you don't have to take the aerator out of gear. Overlap the middle of the machine over the last row of plugs, to insure proper coverage. With practice you can start with a circle and gradually finish with a square pattern along the base lines.

6) On the infield rake the plugs off, they make excellent material for repairing low or bare areas. The shorter the grass is and the dryer the plugs are the easier it is to rake them up. If it is not possible to rake the plugs off, the next step of slice seeding will break them up. However if the plugs are wet you will make a bit of a mess. Try to apply starter fertilizer before you slice seed, this will work down into the soil, then the slicer blades work the seed in to the soil.

7) Operate the Slice seeder in both directions following one base line to start, and the other

when going in the other pattern. A slice seeder is much like a thatcher but the blades are fixed to the reel and cut into the turf much like a circular saw. Use a blend of turf type perennial ryegrass @ 10 - 15 per 1000sq ft. Remember the infield is much like a pool table or golf green, its performance is judged by how smooth and flat it is.

8) Once you has mastered mowing grass, fertilizing, watering, aerating and slice seeding, you can attempt to topdress the renovated turf. Topdressing in the mechanical application of washed sand and maybe a mix of organic compost to help smooth and modify the soil. Depending on the equipment available and man power, this procedure can be done during any of the fore mention steps. Be careful not to add too much topdressing mix at one time because you can cause a layering effect on the turf and even kill the grass. After the topdresssing mix is applied drag the mix with a mat drag (brooms, cyclone fencing, metal drag i.e. works fine too), to work the material into the low spots and aeration holes. The more of the mix we can work into the openings of the turf the better the drainage will eventually be. Don't expect miracles over night, you have to be persistent and duplicate a couple of times a year much like the golf coarse to attain great results.

9) Have players work in their positions, pitchers on the mound, infielders in front of their positions, catchers at homeplate, outfielders on base lines. Instill a pride in their position and work. The underclassmen could clean the bases and install them. The bases should be taken out after each game and stored, then plug the anchor and remove the high spots around the the base area and pack.

10) Some schools have started a sports awareness or field maintenance classes to

better prepare their students for responsibility and self esteem.

11) Attend a grounds work shop, or better yet take your grounds keeper with you to better get a feel for what both of your whats and needs are. You as a educator attend several educational seminar a year, we need to make sure the grounds person has the same opportunity to become better.
