

SOFTBALL FIELD MANAGEMENT AT MIDLAND, MICHIGAN

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Before we can even begin to think about softball field management at our main softball complex and lighted fields we first have to deal with Mother Nature and the reality of the Tittabawassee River which runs along Emerson Park. We can usually count on a flood at least twice a year, in the spring and fall, and in some years flooding conditions in the summer, too, after heavy rains. After the flooding in the spring and we have gone through the clean up and repairs, we can then concentrate on our normal field management practices.

First of all, I would like to give you a little background and data concerning the amount of play we have on our fields and the number of softball teams playing on our fields. These numbers and related info are from our 1989 season. Our 1989 season consisted of over 324 softball teams which broke down as follows:

- a. 179 men's teams
- b. 58 women's teams
- c. 45 fall coed teams
- d. 32 youth teams
- e. 10 summer coed teams

Depending on weather conditions, our play begins the first week in April and continues through the first week in September for spring and summer games at which time our fall coed program begins and ends around the 15th of October. We have a total of 16 softball fields. Six fields are lighted. We average 4 games per day on the lighted fields Monday thru Friday and 2 games per day on the 10 unlighted fields Monday thru Friday. On weekends the six lighted fields average 12 games per day or a total of 44 games per week on each of the six fields with lights for a total of 264 games played on these lighted fields and 20 games per day on the 10 unlighted fields totaling 100 games each per week. This gives us 364 games per week on these 16 fields. We have tournament play every weekend for 23 consecutive weeks or 2.7 tournaments per weekend. This totals up to 6,644 games per year on the lighted and 2300 games on the unlighted fields or 8,944 total games per year. So as you can see we have very intense play which in turn can and does give our maintenance crews a very challenging job to try and maintain quality fields.

Midland has been referred to as the softball capital of the world. We've hosted many local, state and national tournaments and also the 1984 World Championship. We're the home field for the women's Northwood Institute softball team. We've hosted the Women's Slowpitch B N.A.I.A. Nationals and in 1990 we'll be the site for the Women's NCAA Softball Championship. This gives you

a feel for the amount and quality of play we have here in Midland.

I would consider our maintenance to be a medium level maintenance program. I say this due to the continuous amount of play we have from April to October. Our maintenance crews consist of two 3-person crews. Each crew consists of one full-time and two temporary employees. Each crew works four 10-hour days from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Crew A works Mon. - Thurs. and Crew B works Thurs. - Sun. They overlap on Thursdays because while Crew A takes care of the softball fields, Crew B lines our soccer fields.

Currently we're in the process of converting all infields to stonedust material. We bring in graders to cut out and grade to the proper contour, then we add a 4" layer of stonedust. This is then wetted down and rolled to firm and smooth the surface out. This material has drastically reduced the number of rain outs. The edge of the infield along the outfield is periodically raked and leveled out. We mow our fields 3 times per week with a 7 gang, 9 blade fairway unit and depending on conditions we've also used 72" rotary mowers. We maintain a 1 1/2" - 2" mowing height depending on weather conditions. We're currently trying to budget for a Triplex reel type mower for our tournament fields in our Emerson Park Complex for a higher quality of cut. Other maintenance practices consist of the following:

Fertilization - 3-4 lbs. N/M/Yr. of 18-5-9
1-1 1/2 lbs. K/M/Yr. of 13-0-44 Fall Applic.

Herbicide - Contracted out - Spray in late summer, early fall as needed.

Aerification - June - Relieve compaction with an airway unit.

- Core aerify in fall - late September - 2 directions, let cores dry then dragged and fertilized.

Overseeding - During the playing season we overseed with 4-5 lbs. of Manhattan II Perennial Ryegrass with broadcast spreader or by hand in worn out areas in the outfield. Fall - overseed with slit seeder.

Irrigation - Only water our four fields at Emerson Complex with 1 1/2" hose hooked up to Quick Coupler and with Impact Sprinkler. 6-8 settings/field to give 1 inch water/wk.

Our goal is to provide safe fields for our players as well as aesthetically pleasing fields for our fans to enjoy as well. We're trying to improve the safety of our fields to provide

smooth, uniform, stable surfaces for secure footing and also provide dense, uniform, healthy turf playing surfaces.

Future goals include more soil testing to improve our maintenance practices on our turf areas. We are also budgeting for topdressing, material for leveling and better overall turfgrass conditions. We've also had plans drawn up for an automatic irrigation system for our Emerson Park Complex fields to help us provide the best maintained fields possible.