

INFIELD MAINTENANCE

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I will point out some simple maintenance practices, that when done properly can improve the payability and safety of an infield. Approximately fifty percent of the baseballs hit during a game hit the infield surface. Our responsibility is to see that a ball will consistently have true hops. Think SAFETY! A great infield comes from hard work and pride.

Each day check for small stones, get the teams and coaches involved in helping do this. Next, pull a nail drag over the skin. Be careful when nailing, you want to work about the top one inch of your mix. Bring up some old topdressing and fluff it up. But you do not want to disturb your sub soil. Be sure the sub soil is firm and provides good footing.

Then using a metal mesh screen or cocoa mat go over the skin. I suggest alternating the patterns you use to prevent any bowling out effects. Be careful not to drag your mat into the edge of the grass. You don't want to start a lip. Come back and hand rake the edges. Not only should you mat the skin daily, it is nice to mat it after B.P., before the game and after the game if possible. This re-smooths the surface and helps cut down on possible bad hops. Get the coaches and teams involved. After all, it helps them. Team work. You can use a tractor, bunker rake or walk to pull the nails and mats around. Remember all that driving leads to compaction. So try to at least alternate vehicles pulling the mats and nails and hand pulling them.

A common problem is the lip or raised edge that can occur where the skin meets the grass. You must stay on top of this situation and not let it get out of control. Here are a few ways to help prevent and deal with it. Using a water hose pressure wash out the edge. Be careful not to erode the actual soil with the grass. Point the hose at an angle to help prevent this. Next, using a hand toothed rake work it back and forth half on the edge of the grass and half on the skin. This will help loosen some of that lip material. Then using a fan rake or broom, briskly remove this extra material. Be careful picking this material up not to remove your infield mix. An easy way is to turn the fan rake over and using the curved side pull this extra material into piles then remove it. Using a power edger you can clean up the edges. Sometimes you may need to re-measure your baselines and cut out a 2-4 inch lip. Other times you may have to completely remove the lip area with a sod cutter and start over. Be sure to re-level it well and then seed or sod depending on what time allows.

Another common problem is trying to find the right composition of soil. The proper soil mix varies from region to region and ball player needs. Every infield is different. You need to experiment with yours until you find what is right for you. Be sure to take a soil sample and have it tested to find out the percent sand, silt and clay in your mix. Remember good footings, not too soft or too hard. Calcined clay can be very important in an infield. It will help with compaction, yet help hold moisture on those hot dry days and also help it dry out on those rainy days.

An excellent way to incorporate calcined clay into your mix is with a Lily Rotara. After it is mixed you can back blade or gill it to start your leveling. If you can not survey it to check for leveling one

way to do it is using two strings. Place the string from back edge of skin to infield edge approximately four to five feet apart. This will help locate the high and low spots.

Once it is level it is time to get to know your infield mix. The key to every good infield is WATER. You can use water to make the infield tailored to your teams needs. Some players like their position wet, some dry, some soft, some hard... You control the moisture. Water can do all of these. Because weather changes daily, so do your watering practices. Always stay updated on the weather in your area. When watering an infield properly, you must consider many different factors (i.e., wind, humidity, sun, clouds, temperature, how your infield handles water, timing of the watering before the next game). It takes time and a lot of practice to get a feel for your mix. Make your first watering the heaviest to get a base then supplement as needed through the day.

Remember, an infield that plays safe will play well. It takes a lot of hard work and proper maintenance and watering to have that "great" infield. Water is extremely important. Get to know your infield mix and how it works with you.