

MAINTAINING ATHLETIC FIELDS WITH A BUDGET

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Prioritize your fields. Don't treat every field the same. Use your budget wisely. Use more funds for higher profile fields. The returns and favorable comments will come rolling in.

Don't cut on design and construction. A field improperly built will always lower playing conditions and quality while costing more on a yearly basis for maintenance. Many facilities spend wasted efforts on both labor and material costs trying to make up for poor construction. The greatest maintenance program can never fully make up for poor construction. If the soil, sod, or drainage is faulty then your foundation will never properly respond to your maintenance programs. Poorly constructed and maintained fields are unable to withstand abuse from events especially football, lacrosse, and soccer.

Properly constructed fields can respond similar to a backyard situation if turf care programs are lacking. Most simple cultural practices are cut out of the budget because of cost without realizing they are your most cost effective maintenance practices. Fertilization, mowing, aerification and watering techniques carry the main importance when it comes to turf care and field regeneration. These are inexpensive practices yet cut from budget in many ways. Athletic directors often wonder why the field looks and plays so poorly. The answer to the question can only have three choices – poor maintenance, poor construction or over usage.

A budget must maintain the following items or a field approaching 30-50 events or more a year will perform poorly (appearance) and playability not to mention the safety hazard of pocketed fields.

1. Aeration is done 1-2 times per year. Once per month on some fields would not be enough. Solid tines allow this during seasonal play.
2. Over watering – checking the clocks 2-3 times per week is needed with a constant moisture-monitoring program.
3. Under fertilization – If you're not forced to mow 2 times per week or more the field is not growing rapidly enough to regenerate after "event" abuse. Yes, mow more because you fertilize more.
4. Maintain a moderate thatch layer ½"- 1". This layer is manageable while providing a cushion against wear and keeping players "out of the mud". None to little thatch e.g. new seed causes a field to wear quickly.
5. Rotate usage. Any field will "show soil" when you approach 50 or more events per year. The 50 number is not an exact number but it does serve well as a guide and a point of explanation for fields not having turf cover.

Maintenance is inexpensive compared to renovation or reconstruction costs. Budgeting in resodding costs on a yearly basis is a must. For heavily used fields, budget in extra skin material each year also.