

Game Day Preparations

by Steve Wightman, Qualcomm Stadium

We all know that the true test of quality game day preparations are from those fields that consistently provide excellent playability and aesthetics when the cameras are nowhere to be found and the crowds are small.

Successful game day preparations require a comprehensive, well defined field management plan along with the resources and ability to execute the plan within the desired realistic expectations.

The plan will contain the schedule of all the events on the field including practice times, warm-up times, game times, and other sporting and non-sporting events, cultural practices, sport-specific maintenance practices, game setup procedures, including timelines, and personnel schedules.

Cultural practices include, mowing, fertilization, irrigation, aeration and topdressing. Sport-specific practices for baseball include mound repair, infield grooming, edging and dugout cleaning, while some examples for football include divot repair, and goal post maintenance. Examples of game setup procedures for baseball include infield grooming, clay repair, and chalking/painting while football game setup includes painting the field, setting up the team bench areas, putting up

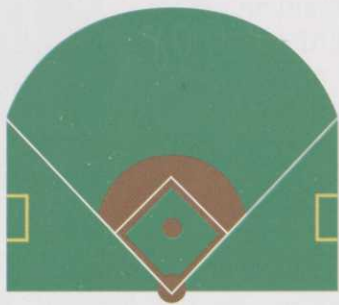
goal post pads, and setting out yard line markers. Finally, examples of personnel schedules include the day-to-day work times for staff members on, at least, a 2-week calendar.

These are only some of the examples included within a comprehensive preparation plan. The more detailed the plan, the more effective and efficient the preparation will be.

As with any effective plan, contingency plans must also be developed. You must play the "what if" game. What if this piece of equipment breaks down - do we have other equipment that can get the job done? Or, if Joe is ill, do we have someone else that can do the job?

One of the biggest and most prevalent variables to be considered is the weather. There is no other industry in our society where weather plays a more significant role. We must always look at the weather and factor it into our preparation plans throughout the course of the year.

Let's take a look at a typical day in baseball field game day preparation. As mentioned earlier, we need to schedule the cultural practices for that day. This most likely would include mowing and some strategic watering either by hand
continued on page 21



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Game Day Preparations

continued from page 20

or with selected sprinklers to supplement the irrigation from the night before. In what order should these be done?

Although it's preferable to mow when the grass is dry and the dew is gone, preparing the field for today's game requires that mowing is done first thing in the morning. This allows for adequate time to groom the infield and repair the clay areas before batting practice begins. The impact that the mower creates when turning on the infield skin should be done before the grooming and the wet-downs take place. Mowing before spot watering will prevent unnecessary compaction and turf damage caused by equipment on wet soil.

If edging the infield areas is scheduled, it should be done after mowing and before any subsequent supplemental watering, especially any watering along the edges. All edges should be detailed and cleaned up before any water is applied in these areas as it will obviously create a muddy mess if edging is attempted soon afterwards.

Immediately following mowing and edging, the field should be selectively watered as early as possible to allow infiltration, percolation and surface drying to take place before any activity occurs. Key areas of strategic watering

include the grass edges along the infield skin and baselines, as well as high traffic areas in front of the dugouts and around the home plate and mound areas. It's usually better to minimize the amount of water applied in the high traffic areas with the irrigation system and then apply any additional water by hand. That way constant visual observations are being made on the areas where exact amounts of soil moisture are critical. Once these are done, the infield skin and other non-grass areas can now be prepared for the game without being impacted by other maintenance procedures.

Cleaning the dugouts is something that also should be done fairly early on game day. Invariably, the media will begin setting up early with many of the setup locations in and around the dugout areas. So, it would behoove the field manager to prepare those areas that will soon be impacted by TV, radio and team personnel before they arrive instead of having to work around them.

Clay repairs at home plate, the mound and bullpen areas also should begin early after mowing has occurred. Early preparation of the clay areas also allows adequate time

continued on page 23

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Game Day Preparations

continued from page 20

for the field manager to provide optimum clay conditions which may change from day to day based on climatic conditions. Hot sunny days may require more work in repairing the clay than cool cloudy days. Allowing yourself time enough to prepare it just right will ensure better playing conditions and, most likely, happier players.

Football game day preparations involve similar procedures relating to cultural practice and time management as those of baseball. However, there are significant differences in game day setup procedures and some maintenance practices that are specific to football.

The two most critical differences between baseball and football field preparations involve soil moisture and field painting. The tremendous stresses placed on the grass from football require a surface that provides maximum strength and durability. This condition is usually achieved with a rootzone that has minimum water. So, the irrigation regime for football is of paramount importance.

Obviously, the amount of water applied to a football field in preparation for a game is different for nearly every game. To achieve the proper soil moisture at kick-off requires a field manager who is at the top of his game. He must be keenly aware of the soil conditions of his/her field along with the efficiency of the irrigation systems and the weather conditions at all times.

There are many different factors that effect the proper amount of water to apply regardless of the type of sport played. Hot dry days can necessitate as much as four times the amount of water to adequately irrigate the turfgrass as cool humid days. The duration of sunlight and its intensity in early autumn is greater than it is in late winter. Winds can have a significant effect on the amount of water to apply to maintain healthy turfgrass yet provide firm, solid field conditions. Maintaining proper soil moisture for each football game is, I think, the biggest challenge a field manager faces.

Another important factor in football field preparation is painting. A football field requires a significant amount of paint in defining the parameters of the sport. The type of paint used and the equipment used to apply it are important decisions to make in successfully preparing the field. All required markings must be properly placed according to league specifications. What tools should be used to accomplish this? How long will it take to paint the field? How many people will I need? These all are questions that must be answered before a preparation plan can be formulated.

The field manager must also be aware of the

weather conditions when painting as with everything else. Hot sunny days will dry paint much more quickly than cold days. So, as the season progresses and colder days prevail and frost becomes a factor, it will take longer to paint the same field.

Scheduling personnel is just as important as any other part of the management plan. When the staff leaves the shop and heads for the field each staff member should have a clear understanding of his/her job for that day. They must also understand the order in which each job is to take place throughout the day. Everyone knowing what the logistical order is for the work to be done during the day will possess a better understanding of the importance of his/her particular job. Everyone performing in a smooth clockwork fashion will allow for many tasks to be accomplished in a minimum amount of time with high quality results. One of the main responsibilities of the field manager is to ensure that the work being done is within the timeframe adopted and is of the quality desired and expected.

Game day preparation involves much more than just performing certain tasks. Successful preparations involve a field manager willing to take charge in identifying the various tasks to perform, determining the best way to accomplish those tasks and determining the order in which the tasks are done. Successful field managers learn from previous experiences and seek out information that will help them formulate a good management plan.

Adapted from Steve's presentation at the 2002 STMA Conference & Exhibition, Las Vegas, Nevada.



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