

DOC'S DUGOUT - An Inning From Our Past

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Not So Long Ago-Success on a low Budget to reduce injuries

During the 1980's there was a period of time when many school districts were inundated with lawsuits stemming from playground and athletic field injuries. Lawyers were taking these negligence cases and many of them paid out some huge sums of money.

A special meeting of the Seattle School Board was called into session during the fall of 1982 to deal with the liability issues stemming from its high school football teams practicing on fields of dirt and rocks. Player injuries had been quite high and coaches, parents and players were very unhappy with the conditions found on the district's practice fields. It was decided that something had to be done since the district had just settled a multi-million dollar injury lawsuit. At the meeting, the board allocated \$100,000 to make improvements to eight district-owned practice fields.

Professional opinions were sought by the Seattle grounds department to determine the extent of what could be done for field improvement. The opinions were different and the cost estimates ranged from \$30,000 to \$70,000 per field. A session was held to determine what was wanted compared with what was essential. It was determined they wanted a good grass playing surface with an automatic irrigation system that could be easily maintained. It was further decided that all work on the field renovation would be accomplished in-house, except the installation of the irrigation system. Sand-based fields were also selected for player safety.

A local irrigation contractor designed the system and contracted the installation of the sprinklers for approximately \$4,000 per field. All fields were rototilled to a depth of 14 inches and clods of sod and as many rocks as possible were removed. The sprinkler system was installed using 1 1/4 inch PVC and 10 sprinkler heads to cover all grass areas within the running tracks. The playing field was covered with sand, the areas between the hash marks received a depth of 8 inches and the remainder of the field tapering to the sidelines 4 inches. The fields were seeded and within 2 weeks grass was growing. Some schools were using the fields within 120 days. Eight fields were completed at a cost that averaged \$10,150 per field, including labor.

The Result

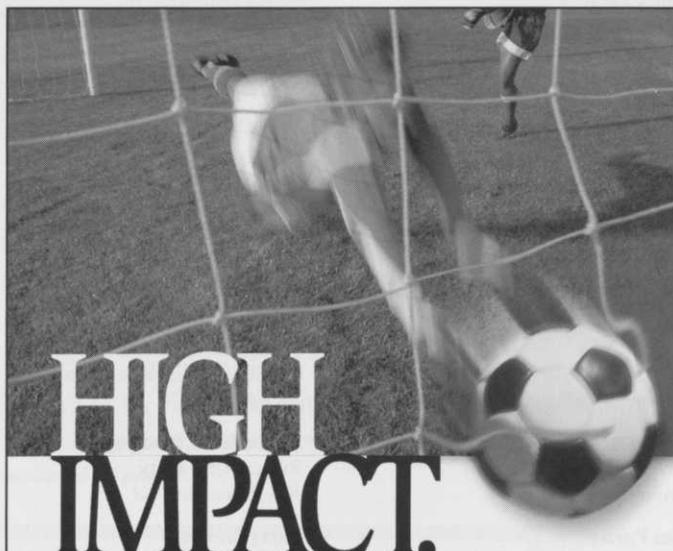
An ongoing plan was put into place that included aeration and fertilization twice per year and topdressing and overseeding once per year. Sod was grown in a sand-base so they could patch badly worn areas when needed. Through trial and error they found out that sod grown on soil would not survive if transplanted on a sand-based field.

The fields were reported to look beautiful and there

was a substantial decrease in injuries. The following are the reported injury statistics for three of the eight schools:

<u>Before Renovation (1982)</u>	<u>After Renovation (1983)</u>
387 ankle injuries	169 ankle injuries
68 knee injuries	26 knee injuries
493 wrist injuries	112 wrist injuries

It is apparent the installation of sand-based grass practice fields was the key to a reduction in player injuries. Coaches reported the cost of tape was cut by 1/3 and the life of football clothes was increased due to the elimination of the abrasive surface. The key to the success of the Seattle School District program has been the maintenance performed by school district personnel. Without good people and their dedication to the job there would not be safe fields. We at STMA applaud all of the people in the sports turf industry for their dedication, persistence and hard work to make this world a safer place to play.



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