

“An Ocean County Athletic Field Construction Story”

**by Richard Oats*

For those of you who have attended a Floyd Perry seminar or read one of his books, you know he is legendary for teaching athletic field managers how to creatively make the most of resources at hand. Floyd Perry will point out how you can save hundreds of dollars by using a piece of chain link fence to make an infield drag mat instead of purchasing one off the shelf. What if you used this same type of frugal resourcefulness to save **thousands of dollars** on an athletic field project? It is being done in Ocean County New Jersey—known for summer vacations and sandy soils.

In 1999 Casey Parker (Sports Field Manager Association of NJ Member # 992) was given the task to build two new football fields in the Pine Barren sandy soil of Lacey Township. Casey knew soil amendments were desperately needed or the sand would forever pose a problem for water and nutrient retention and healthy turf rooting. It so happens that Casey is the Director of Public Works in Lacey, which includes the Parks Department, the Road Department and a Class C Leaf Composting Facility. While many architects would spec in the addition of an outside source of topsoil to amend a poor athletic field soil, Casey thought differently. Casey had mounds of composted leaf mulch readily available and two new fields sorely in need of organic enhancement. Casey cleared the site and stripped the native soil (mostly sand) off. Rather than trucking in topsoil, Casey trucked the “native strippings” back to his compost facility and blended 1 part leaf compost to 2 parts native soil. A trommel screen was borrowed from the good people at the Ocean County Recycling Center for screening and blending the final mix. The material was transported back to the job site and was disked into the top 6 to 8 inches of the soil profile. In addition to the leaf compost, Casey added lime and Oceangro® 5-5-0 fertilizer.

Casey knew about Oceangro for two years but was hesitant to try it for public relations reasons. Oceangro is an organic granular fertilizer derived from sewage sludge solids that are heat dried and screened into a granular product. Casey didn't think the public would be friendly to the thought of such a fertilizer being applied to their athletic fields. He decided to give Oceangro a chance however, after learning the EPA and NJDEP monitor fertilizers like Oceangro and the NJ Department of Agriculture registered Oceangro as a fertilizer—like any other fertilizer on the market. Casey decided a control test was in order to see if Oceangro made a difference as a grow in product. Half of the new football field complex was fertilized with a synthetic starter fertilizer and the other half was fertilized with Oceangro. When the field came in, Casey noticed a dramatic difference between the Oceangro half and the synthetic side. Casey noticed the Oceangro section had a much better germination

success (7 days instead of the 3 weeks needed for the synthetic starter fertilizer field) as well as significantly deeper rooting. It didn't take long to decide it would be best to disk the synthetic field in, add Oceangro and reseed to allow the field to grow in evenly. Best yet, since Oceangro is a product of Ocean County—the Ocean County Utilities Authority **donated Oceangro to Lacey Township at no charge** and The Authority even loaned a spreader to Lacey Township to help spread Oceangro.

Casey seeded his fields at a 5 to 6 lb. per thousand square foot rate with a 90% Turf Type Tall Fescue and 10% Bluegrass and witnessed great germination with his leaf mulch/Oceangro mixture. He didn't stop there however—the following season he aggressively followed up by slit seeding at 2 to 4 lbs per thousand to push the turf density to where he wanted it. So how did the fields turn out? Lacey Township Athletic Fields have a reputation for being the best in the area. Casey himself keeps the standard high—he says he likes to keep his turf “dense & deep”. Since the two football fields were grown in, Casey has used the same method for building all new fields in Lacey Township. There have never been any complaints about how he built his fields or the use of Oceangro and almost no one knows how much money Casey saved Lacey by leveraging the resources at hand. Casey Parker noted that while Oceangro did a great job as a grow in fertilizer, he now uses Oceangro at the end of his sports season as a micro nutrient dormant

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Oceangro

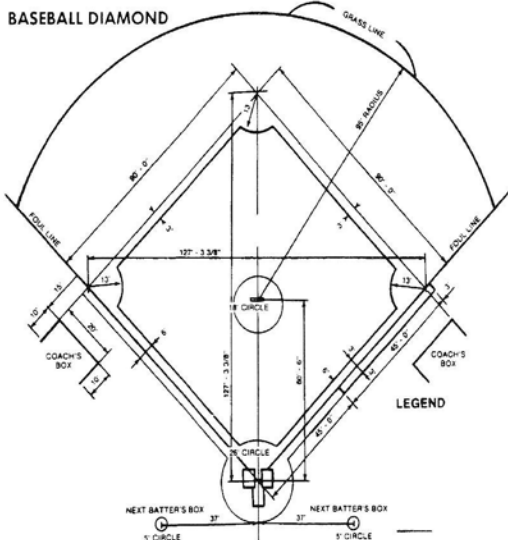
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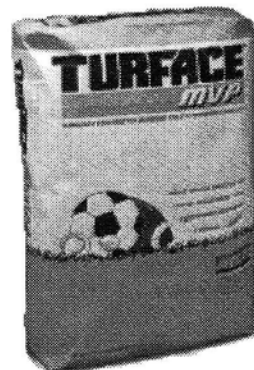
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fertilizer supplement. "Oceangro is great but it's not a magic pill that will replace all other fertilizers." Casey likes the slow release, non-burning, non-leaching nature of the organic side of 5-5-0 Oceangro. He equally values the ease of application and complete analysis of the 19-19-19 synthetic fertilizer now in use on his fields for the rest of his program. Casey recognizes the importance and shortfalls of both organic and synthetic products and uses both to the advantage of maximum turf health.

To gain the benefit of both worlds of organic and synthetic fertilizers, some fertilizer blenders offer hybrid blends combining both

If your soils are deficient in organic matter—like the sandy soils in Ocean County—adding organic fertilizers or hybrids is a step in the right direction, but a permanent fix requires bigger thinking. Purchasing and adding topsoil is one option, adding leaf compost you have on-hand is another demonstrated and more resourceful way to accomplish the same task.

The next time you're in Ocean County, check out any Lacy Township athletic field. Here is proof of a turf manager who knows what he is doing, is open minded and has saved his Township a bundle by working with what is available. ▲

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"Monthly Field Tip" Bug of the month "Bagworms"

*by Jim Hermann, CSFM**

Although not specific to sports fields, these little noseemus can be devastating to the beauty of the landscape and cause much anguish to the grounds manager.

Little brown bags attached to twigs on the outer most branches of both deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs are the tell tale sign of this pest. At first glance, these bags resemble a bit of dead foliage. Further examination will reveal a bag up to 2 inches in length composed of interwoven bits of dead foliage, twigs and silk. During the summer, a dark brown or black caterpillar is contained in the bag. Initially the caterpillar drags the bag around as it feeds on leaves, enlarging the bag as it grows. By late August, the caterpillar finishes feeding and attaches the bag to a twig. Inside the bag, it forms a pupa. Several days later, an adult moth emerges from the pupa. The female is wingless and stays within the bag. The male then flies to the old bag (or rather the bag containing the female) and they mate while she is still inside. She then lays a mass of eggs within the bag and dies.

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