

TOURNAMENT TIME - A GROUNDSKEEPER'S ACCOUNT OF PREPARATION FOR A BASEBALL TOURNAMENT

Rich Watson*

Hosting a tournament is a lot of work, however it is a good opportunity to showcase your facility. There will be people seeing your field for the first time, so make them remember it for the right reasons. We were informed this year that we would be one of three sites hosting the 33rd Annual Joe Hartman Diamond Classic. The tournament brings together the top 16 baseball teams in South Jersey. On May 13, 2006 Overbrook High School hosted two games, but the preparation started weeks earlier.

The call informing us about the tournament came in mid-April, so we had a good amount of time to prepare. First, we checked our baseball team's schedule for possible conflicts. Next was to check our field maintenance program. As luck would have it, a fertilizer application was scheduled the week before the tournament as well as spraying Roundup on our skinned areas. Timing is everything. The grass looked great and our skinned areas were free of weeds.

With two weeks to go, we started cutting-in our pattern for the games. We cut the outfield in three directions at 2 inches every other day. The infield was cut in two directions at 1½-inch every other day. We use an Exmark Lazer Zero Turn mower (with a striping kit) to cut our outfield and an Exmark walk-behind mower for the infield. Sharp blades are very important, so we change them at least once a week.

The week of the tournament was very challenging. We had two games of our own in addition to the final prep for the big games. The day before the tournament is very important. We tried to do as many things as possible to make game day a little easier. Bullpen mounds were repaired, extra bleachers were moved, trash cans emptied, the infield was edged, and a sound check was done on the sound system. We made final cuts on the infield and outfield because there is no time the day of the games. Our mound and home plate areas are made of Hilltopper mound clay. Both areas were repaired and covered. The infield was scarified, graded smooth, and then lightly rolled. The automatic irrigation system was used to wet down the infield at night, setting the stage for game day.

When the day of the tournament finally arrives, it's payday for all of the hard work. The day started with a light dragging of the infield, followed by another good soaking of the skinned areas. Next, foul lines and batters boxes were painted and chalked. At the last minute we decided to stencil the name of the tournament and the team names on the grass behind home plate. This was a nice touch that the teams and

fans really seemed to appreciate. Finally, we painted the bases, pitching rubber, and home plate. It was game time.

The tournament was a great success. In between games we repaired the mound and plate, smoothed the infield with stiff drags, and touched up the chalk and paint. We wanted to make sure the second game played the same as the first. The coaches, players, and fans were very complimentary about our facility. That makes all the hard work worth it.

Putting together the maintenance end of a baseball tournament takes a lot of planning and hard work from a lot of people. My crew of Greg Bunting, Tom Crosby, and Kevin Shipman were outstanding. Their professionalism and hard work really showed in the playing condition of the field. Also, I would like to thank Dave Lalena of Philadelphia Turf for letting us use a Toro Workman with a Rahn groomer and a Toro Groundsmaster 3505d for the tournament.

Tournament time is an opportunity to show off your field, while giving the teams a fair, competitive surface to play on. If you get the chance, step up to the plate and be remembered for the right reasons.

* Rich Watson is Grounds Supervisor, Pine Hill Public Schools, Pine Hill, NJ



Greg Bunting, Pine Hill Public Schools, applies water to the baseline prior to the 33rd Annual Joe Hartman Diamond Classic held at Overbrook High School, Pine Hill, NJ.