The “proactive” sports field manager on the other hand has dealt with the problem before the season began by making some basic adjustments. He may have realigned the baselines to favor the inside of the base path by positioning them closer to the inside turf perimeter or he may have constructed a radius around the 1st and 3rd bases which allows a grounder to pass to the outside of the base paths. In any event, the objective is to allow more distance between the bases and the turf perimeter. At a minimum he removed the lip to allow positive surface drainage to help manage potential water problems.

Many of those involved in the planning stages of a new field desire their own little Yankee Stadium. They want no more than a 0.5% slope extending from behind the pitchers mound in all directions. They may desire a mix that is 60% sand and 40% silt and clay because someone said it works for them. They may even go to the expense of a complete gravel blanket under the infield to help evacuate surface water that ponds within the infield when positive surface drainage is not maintained.

For some, this might be the perfect infield. For others it can evolve into a maintenance nightmare. It is the opinion of many, myself included that a 0.5% slope is not sufficient to evacuate water from a moderately maintained infield skin. It requires more intense maintenance than a 0.75 or 1% slope. A 0.5% slope is not sufficient to effectively evacuate surface water from a turf infield constructed on a heavy textured soil. Turf infielders constructed with less than 1% slope rely heavily on internal drainage characteristics consistent with a lighter textured soil, a bypass drainage system of an effective design or both to efficiently evacuate surface water.

Unless the infield skin is watered on a regular basis, the 60-40 mix will more than likely turn to hard clay similar to that of concrete. If the mix happens to contain more than 10 or 15% silt this infield mix could have the potential to become mucky when overly wet and extremely dusty when dry.

Although typically a negative influence, the gravel blanket under the infield skin will be extremely inefficient in the evacuation of surface water, even though it is an effective means of managing a high water table beneath the infield. The proactive sports field manager will educate himself, start with an effective design and take the action necessary to manage and maintain the playing field in a safe and playable condition.

It has been my experience that a very difficult challenge to the sports field manager is to adapt design or reconstruction criteria to site specific conditions. An infield with a slope that radiates outward from a center point in the vicinity of the pitcher’s area could be more expensive and more problematic than an alternative design, depending on site specific conditions.