

SETTING YOUR LINES RIGHT WITH THE EMPHASIS ON STENCILING

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Whether it is for function or decoration, lines and logos personalize your fields and give your team the home field advantage. Almost all sports and games played on turf or packed clay require some form of lines or markings to help define boundaries, and assist the officials in making correct calls. Lines help the participants perform best by bringing order and strategy to the game. These markings are usually painted or marked with a non-caustic pulverized limestone. Here are some things that I have learned from other sports field managers that help me set lines.

Measurements: Sports require accurate measurements. Tape measures are more precise than measuring wheels. Surveying instruments are the most exact and may be required at the higher levels of the sport. "Square" or 90° corners can be made without surveying instruments by using the 3-4-5 method. Where you want to make a corner, make one line perpendicular to another. On one line, measure out from the corner 30 feet.

On the adjacent line, starting from the same point, measure out 40 feet. Draw a line from your 30 foot mark to the 40 foot mark. The result should be 50 feet. If not, adjust either line so that there is a 50 foot measurement from the 30 and 40 foot marks.

Dry Line Marking: For human safety, always use a non burning, non caustic marking material such as pulverized limestone. Avoid marking turfgrass with a dry marking material as it might injure turf, modify the soil or over time, create a ridge on the playing surface that could become hazardous to players. Dry marking materials work best on bare soil or "infield dirt". Dry line markers are similar to a drop fertilizer spreader. The marking apparatus features a narrow opening that is the width of the line and can be operated by one person. Other types of markers include a trough type that can be several feet long for marking base paths or shorter for marking batters boxes. These are usually used in the higher levels of baseball or softball and can require 2 people to handle.

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Field Marking Paint: Paints consist of liquid (or solvent), color (or pigment), sticker (or binder) and other additives such as a fast drying agent. Sports field marking paints are usually water based latex acrylics. Petroleum distillate based paints or volatile organic compounds (VOC paints) can be injurious to plant tissues. Field marking paint is available the forms of aerosol spray paint in inverted cans and bulk paint in 1-5 gallon pail containers. Bulk paint may be premixed ready to use or it may need to be diluted with water in some ratio.

Painting Equipment: The most basic field paint equipment is the paint brush and roller, simple and effective but time consuming. Many sports field managers with only a few sports fields use the inverted aerosol spray paint can holder machine. This is a tool that no sports field manager should be without. It is helpful for touchups, for painting contrasting colors quickly and as a backup for when the primary paint machine breaks down. Most sports field managers use some form of a powered paint machine. These include sprayers ranging from a CO2 tank units to gasoline powered compressor or pumps to electric pump models. Push, self propelled and riding paint machines are available. Be sure that your machine is kept clean; in good repair and have spare parts are on hand.

Preparations for painting: For best results, mow the turf (at least where the lines are) before painting. In dry weather, avoid painting right after mowing unless you give the turf some water. This will help prevent a burning effect. Avoid painting wet grass. Paint does not adhere well to wet grass. To remove dew, connect two 100 foot water hoses and with a person on each end, start in the end zone and drag the hose the length of the field.

Paint Can Tips: Before shaking, tap the can with your hand to gently break the marble loose, then shake vigorously to thoroughly mix the paint. If you store aerosol cans upside down, it will make it easier to break the marble loose. Avoid temperature extremes. In cold weather, fill a 5 gallon pail with hot water, and put the aerosol cans in to keep them warm. Some brands of spray paint have adjustable tips on the can that can rotate to make a wide or narrow line.

Mixing Paint: Dilute (if necessary) your paint per the paint or sprayer manufacturers recommendations. Mix paint by pouring bucket to bucket, or, use a drill powered mixing device or use a bulk paint dispenser with agitation mixing. For best results, always strain the product before adding to the paint sprayer.

Paint Application Tips: Always string your lines for the best results. If you are painting lines on dry infield dirt, first moisten the dirt with water. This will prevent the paint beading up in the dust. Remember that when painting lines, your gait will influence not only the quality of the line (straightness, brightness and width) but also how much paint you will use.

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Infield Soils and Topdressings

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Spike your infield on a regular basis to smooth out cleat marks and other imperfections. You shouldn't have to cut deeper than 1/2 inch. Follow-up by dragging and watering the skin. Again, keep that skin moist as much as possible during the season.

Special pure clays are used in the batter's boxes, catcher's box and the pitcher's landing area. Topdressing these areas takes a little more care. This clay is chewed-up by cleats and eventually spread around into the topdressing, so it's a good idea to sweep off and replace this topdressing on a regular basis.

When that clay mixes with the topdressing, it inhibits the flow of moisture and makes the topdressing very sticky. This makes it hard for deep watering of the mound and home plate skin areas. At Oriole Park, we usually replace ours after every third game.

If you use dry line chalk to mark your foul lines and batter's boxes, it's a good idea to scoop up what's left of the lines after the days games. This will prevent the chalk from becoming part of your skin mix, which can cause discoloration, a change in your soil texture over time, and a decrease in the flow of moisture into the base mix.

Finally, as you head into winter, when the field will be unused for several months, either scrape the topdressing off the field and remove it, or create a catch basin an inch or so deep in the skin wherever the skin meets the turf. This prevents large amounts of topdressing from blowing into the turf edge and creating large lips during the windy months of winter. Here at Oriole Park, we do both as a good preventative maintenance practice for lips.

Remember, these are just guidelines to help you make better decisions when building, renovating, or maintaining an infield skin. There are many variables, especially when it comes to soils.

It's the responsibility of each groundskeeper to know what makes an ideal skin and to apply that knowledge. Use the resources available to you. You may not have the time or dollars to create the perfect skin infield, but you can't improve what you have unless you know what you're working towards.

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both common. Other tools include hash mark sleds and batter's box frames. Some sports field managers use planks as straight edges for painting along wide out of bounds lines or along end zone letters. If number stencils become warped, place on concrete and allow the sun's heat to warm and flatten them in a couple of hours. When dotting stencils, use an aerosol can to do it. This way the paint will dry faster. When painting logos, paint a white base coat first and allow it to dry. Then paint colors on top. Don't go by the rule "If a little paint looks good, a whole lot of paint will look great!" Too much paint can be harmful to turf. On most logos and letters, a border around each will make your work stand out on the field.

Paint Removal: If you make a mistake, be sure to keep an aerosol can of green paint or some turf colorant handy as an "eraser". I use a long handle, soft bristle truck washing brush and some mild soapy water as well as water hose for paint removal when necessary.

Sports field graphics make the game easier to play on and watch. Sharp looking field graphics draw the eyes away from field imperfections such as wear. It helps to create team pride, brings out the beauty of your field and showcases the talents of you and your crew.

Don Savard is a Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM); Certified Grounds Manager (CGM); Director, Athletic Facilities and Grounds, Salesianum School; and SFMANJ President

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