

Atlantic City *Surf Stadium* in 2012

By Sean Connell



This year the City of Atlantic City had the old Surf Stadium resurfaced and made ready for play. This stadium was originally a minor league stadium for the Independent league team. Since the team bankrupted in 2008 the stadium had not been maintained. The box seats had to have new sheet rock. The roof had to be repaired with new shingles. The field had to be re-surfaced. I was the low-bid contractor on the field portion of this stadium.

The original bid had a basic premise of how to re-do the field by providing specifications for grading, sod, infield mix and warning track mix. This stadium was built like a large golf green: subsurface drains with a gravel layer serving as a water table and straight sand as a growing medium. The grading plan had one elevation of "11" at home plate and no other reference points. Of course, the bid instructions were to laser grade the field and nothing else. All other assumptions were up to the winning contractor to survey and make their own grading plan.

Well, that's what I did, just like most jobs I do. I shot the existing grades and gridded-out the elevations. From those grades, I calculated the slopes by making the least amount of cuts and fills, and made a grading plan. It is easy. I have been using laser technology since 1992 when I first saw it applied on a golf tee. You find the lowest elevation and work out from there. Of course with a field that is layered with a gravel blanket and sand capped, you have to check depths of material and make field adjustments. I quickly discerned that this field most likely had never been laser graded. It was flat but had some depth issues in some places from way too much material to way too shallow.

The amazing part of laser grading is the machine control aspect of it. I am still amazed after owning three laser tractors for all these years when the machine is telling me to cut and fill, but rest assured I trust the equipment. And it never lets me down. In this project, we had a deadline of 30 days to strip and remove the sod, rototill under the organic layer (which was still huge because the field had not been aerified in years), laser grade, then sod. Also: amend the infield and add material, re-grade the warning track and, as an added bonus, the irrigation which was supposed to 95% functional was really about 20% functional.


This part is where having tons of experience kicks-in in all facets of construction. We completed the striping, rototilling, grading and re-sodding in 6 days. - and had a quite a jump on the infield mix and warning track. Once the sod was down, the pressure was off somewhat. We could work from the warning track. The irrigation was of course repaired at same time I was doing these tasks by a company named Quality Cut, Inc. out of Farmingdale, NJ Doug and Jerry McGee brothers. I have used these guys before but not on such a big job. They exceeded my expectations and identified broken wires, leaks and heads improperly functioning. They had the system at 100% efficient in 2 days. They did a great job and I could not have met my time line without them.

The field was constructed with a rootzone consisting of straight sand with no organic material - which was great the day it rained after we tilled it. It rained inches overnight and all day. The next morning we graded and by the end of the day it was dusty, so I was pretty sure the drains worked. The following day we sodded the field using a track sod installer called a WMI Warner Manufacturing track machine. The sand dried out so quick and had no organic matter to it. A simple turn with any

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the accident after OSHA and our safety engineer has evaluated the situation.

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We appreciate the help of the city's emergency response team. I'll be glad to talk with you again when we know more.

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piece of equipment made a rut that had to be repaired making sod installation a pain. Using straight sand as a growing medium came from the golf industry and is called a California method. The theory was you could save money without adding organic material or the cost of blending. I have seen method used on golf courses and athletic fields with most opinions siding with the notion that they wish they had used some organics.

After sod, we laid plywood over to the infield. We did a physical soil test for particles and determined that the infield mix was a very sandy material. The test came back with of course heavy sand, light clay and silt for existing infield mix. The city asked about different choices in infield mixes which we reviewed and selected a Marco clay product. The infield mix they choose was 15 to 20% percent clay. Not quite a major league scale but close. As an added amenity we installed 2 zones of irrigation dedicated to just the infield. This irrigates the infield completely in just minutes maximizing efficiently. Some customers have commented that having water on demand like that is better than adding heavy clay infield mixes. The exotic infield mixes with high clay contents have so much additional maintenance involved we have noticed that they prefer irrigation water to seal infields before games. We rototilled blending-in new infield mix, laser graded and topdressed with vitrified clay which is a sister product to the infield mix. It matched colors very well and finished very nice.

The warning track is 24' wide on the outfield side and 15' on the foul lines. It had not been maintained in years, so the first thing we did was strip the top 2 inches of material. We then recycled the material by screening on site. We handpicked large weeds and then screened with a skid steer bucket that was built for rock removal. The process was a great rain day project that we completed in stages. After cleaning we spread the material and picked weeds and trash as needed to groom. After the warning track was finished we built the bullpen mounds (2 on each side) and the pitcher's mound out of Marco mound clay products. The batter's boxes were also constructed with green bricks and the Marco mound clay.

All in all we only worked about 14 days on construction. As soon as we installed sod, the 30 day maintenance began. The contract had a 2-year option on maintenance in which the City contracted with Georgia Golf Construction. We just completed our first year of maintenance and have closed the stadium for the winter. I am writing this article just after the Hurricane Sandy and the second Nor'easter the following week. The stadium field did well. We had to pick shingles that got ripped off. Right before all the rain we aerified and topdressed which served us well. The field drained very well considering the amount of rain we received in a week.

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