

Volunteering at the 2013

Major League Baseball

All-Star Game

by Matt Olivi



All-Star festivities started with the Celebrity and Legends game on Sunday, July 14, the Home Run Derby competition on Monday, July 15 and ended with the 2013 All-Star Game on Tuesday, July 16. Despite the added challenges of extreme hot weather, concert performances, ceremonial rehearsals, photo shoots and an overall increased media presence, the professional field management staff accomplished every task on the demanding maintenance schedule.

Throughout the three-day event, the large number of additional media personnel and all of their additional equipment had to be accommodated. Every effort is made to preserve the turfgrass on the field through traffic management and by using protective covers when possible. Protecting sensitive areas on the playing surface is standard operating procedure for managing traffic such as batting practice; however, for the All-Star Event, these efforts had to be intensified. Extra grounds crewmen were utilized accordingly to set-up extra turf mats on the high traffic areas. While the warning track areas behind home plate and in front of the dug-outs seemed to be prime real estate for the media, there was still a great deal of encroachment onto the turf along those areas. The

This past July, the MLB All-Star Game was held at nearby Citi Field in Flushing, New York. Members of the SFMANJ Board of Directors, including myself, Scott Bills (SFMANJ Secretary), and Brad Park (Editor, SFMANJ Update newsletter) were afforded an opportunity to assist the Citi Field grounds crew with maintenance operations throughout the three day event. Kenny MacNish, Rutgers undergraduate student and Kevin Rundstrom, recent Rutgers graduate also volunteered, both of whom were past participants in the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) Student Challenge.



Grounds staff set-up temporary fences around the turf surrounding the home plate, field logos and other sensitive areas. Not only did the turf require protection, but so did the media crews. Extra turf mats and screens were set-up to protect MLB Network Analysts who were broadcasting from a temporary stage that was set-up just behind third base.

Working as a public employee, I haven't had much experience incorporating advertising and a national television production into game day preparation. At the Major League level, each event provides separate sponsorship opportunities and corresponding signage and visual displays that need to be set-up. For the All-Star events, the grounds staff had specific tasks and instructions for sign

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placement on the field, the cleaning of outfield walls in preparation for sponsorship decal placement, and the changing of full wall pads when necessary. Even the drag mats used between innings can be a great opportunity for sponsors to advertise. During the All-Star



Game on Tuesday night, all three base pads were changed every couple of innings or so. This was not done for aesthetics alone. Each base pad had a built-in wireless microphone to pick-up game sounds for the television broadcast. Each time

a pad was changed, so was the microphone and transmitter. Again, these were all new experiences for me.

The warm temperatures may have been the greatest challenge to field operations. Crews had to keep themselves hydrated and in turn had to do the same for the playing surface.

The turfgrass, infield skin and warning track seemed like they couldn't take enough water over the three day period. I was amazed by the irrigation requirements of the entire playing surface. As mentioned earlier, the itineraries of news crews, broadcast network operations and concert rehearsals limited maintenance and irrigation time. On the day of the All-Star Game, temperatures climbed steadily throughout the day and hovered around 100 degrees just before game time. Despite the weather conditions and a tight maintenance schedule, the grounds crew kept the grass green and the infield skin perfectly playable.



The additional challenges of hosting such a world-class event were managed through careful planning and being able to adapt to changing demands throughout the day. The increased man-power seemed to come easily through the helpful nature of industry professionals who volunteered to assist. Grounds managers from other professional ball parks, material suppliers, and Sports Turf Managers Organization of New York (STMONY) members all jumped at the opportunity to help. I'm always impressed by the willingness of our industry partners to help each other. From the MLB All-Star Game to a local Little League Game, we all have a common vested interest in the success of any event played on sports fields. It was a pleasure to work with Bill Deacon (Director of Field Operations at Citi-Field) and Staff who flawlessly managed every aspect of this year's Event. Their professionalism and dedication was an example to all who were part of making the 2013 MLB All-Star a huge success.

Matt Olivi is Sports Turf Manager, Piscataway Board of Education, Piscataway, NJ; and SFMANJ President

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