

Let's Play Baseball

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This past summer I had the honor of helping out my community. The city of Belle Plaine was awarded the site for the 81st Annual State Amateur Baseball Tournament held August 19 through September 6, 2004. Upon learning of this exciting opportunity, I told the Belle Plaine baseball association that I wanted to help out with the turfgrass. Because they wanted to highlight the fields and were aware of my professional background, the association jumped at the offer.

Last April, as soon as the snow melted away, I began my project. The previous fall the entire outfield had been sodded, so I was concerned with the rapid establishment of a good root system, the foundation for a safe and great playing field.

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My first stop was to the local _____ where I came up with an effective and economical plan to produce healthy grass. The coop began spreading fertilizer in late April with a starter product followed by monthly applications of 20- 20- 20 maintenance fertilizer through August at 250 lbs of N per acre. Needless to say, the field was a beautiful shade of green all summer.

Another key aspect of field establishment was the proper use of the field's irrigation system. Fortunately for me, the city had installed a new Toro irrigation system the previous fall. From early May until the tournament began I had exceptional control and was able to maintain a moist environment for the correct development of the turf.

With the irrigation and fertilization programs under control, I developed a mowing program. It was necessary for me to allow the turf to grow a bit long in the spring due to recovery from installation. Up until the middle of July we mowed the new field at three inches.

On July 19th we began to gradually lower the height of cut and two weeks later had it down to a very upright one



The Belle Plaine baseball field was in exceptional condition for the 81st Annual State Amateur Baseball Tournament.

and one-half inches. At this point I decided to bring my back-up Toro 216 mower to the ballpark. Luckily, my father, Manley Vinkemeier, volunteered to mow the field for us. And talk about a pattern, my father did an exceptional job of implementing the design I had created in my mind when I first heard of this opportunity. A week later, the field had beautiful, green stripes. The community was amazed on how its ball park was looking.

With the State tournament 20 days away the local John Deere company donated another mower weekly so we could double cut once every seven days a week. At this point, we were mowing the ballpark four times a week. I was amazed at how the field was shaping up: and the perfect straight lines of light and dark green, the beautiful checkerboard pattern. We were no longer maintaining a ball field, but rather manicuring a masterpiece.

The three-week State Amateur Baseball Tournament started on August 20th. Four games each day were played on our park, from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. We would start maintenance at 7 a.m., so we would be completed with the two-hour mowing project and be well out of sight before the baseball players arrived. Soon, Labor Day was here and the State Amateur Tournament was over. Thirteen thousand fans from all over the state had a chance to see our hometown ballpark.

I was very happy with the way the field turned out and held up through the three weekends of games, and very proud that I volunteered to help out my community. The project was great fun, but I couldn't have done it without the help of Belle Plain Coop Simon's John Deere Dealer, my father Manley Vinkemeier and Glencoe Country Club.