

MANAGING THE MSU ATHLETIC FIELDS

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The MSU athletic fields comprise an area of 80 acres of soft surface. This includes soccer fields, football practice fields, track area, intramural fields, baseball diamonds, band practice fields and grass area around the intramural swimming pool. The Red Cedar River serves as the main source of irrigation water for 56 acres of this with some well water from campus wells being used. Part of the water is distributed by an underground system fed from the river and the rest is portable above ground irrigation pipe and sprinkler hooked to the campus well system.

Included in this athletic area is seven acres of hard surface. This includes tennis courts, track, pool deck and several cement basketball courts scattered throughout campus.

These facilities are used by groups from various sports teams, intramural sports and recreative services, sport camps, club sports, band and health and physical education and recreation classes. Most of the athletic areas are also used by the public during certain times of the year.

Approximately \$115,000 comes from the Athletic Department, and \$13,000 comes from the Academic Grounds budget for intramural sports and teaching health, physical education and recreation classes.

The athletic ground staff consists of one supervisor and four regular full-time groundskeepers. During the growing season, the full time crew is supplemented with about 80 hours per week of student labor.

The goal of the staff is to perform the annual maintenance on the field in the very short time span between when the facilities are being used by the different groups and when weather and time allows.

The fields are set up differently for intramural sports during certain times of the year to facilitate the particular sports in season. During spring, along with varsity baseball, softball and tennis, the intramural fields are converted into 16 softball diamonds. This entails marking out the fields with marble dust, erecting backstops and setting the bases at the proper distance. Remarking the fields throughout the spring is an ongoing process because they are used daily and late into the night. In the fall, this area is converted into ten (10) touch football fields and marked appropriately.

The track is all-weather material and takes very little work to maintain. The area around the pool has to be mowed weekly with the clippings removed and trash taken care of daily.

The baseball field requires marking, setting of bases and pitcher mound, canvas on fence, setting of foul poles, dragging the skinned areas and warning track. At times during the spring when weather is bad, a canvas is put on the infield to keep it dry. These tasks are usually performed before every game and redone between games if there is a double header.

The two practice football fields are used for six weeks of spring practice beginning in April. The fields are marked out and a canvas

barrier is erected on the fence surrounding the fields to control people and players. After spring practice, there is a football school for two weeks. Then during fall, practices are conducted on the field for the duration of the season. To compound the problem of the high use, cars are parked on these fields for all home football games.

The soccer field is used on a regular basis by the varsity soccer team, club teams and intramurals. Other teams such as lacrosse also use this facility.

The band practice fields are marked out like football fields so the bands can practice their formations. The MSU band, along with the bands and drill teams from other schools use these fields during summer months.

The football stadium has artificial turf but requires about 2,000 man hours per year for maintenance. Most of this time is spent cleaning the stands, vacuuming the field, repairing and removing gum from the carpet.

The turf areas are treated with 3 lbs. of actual nitrogen per year. These treatments are applied in the form of one application of urea in the fall, a complete fertilizer in June and another application of urea around August. Herbicides are used as needed for weed control. The fields are irrigated as needed through July and August.

Areas that are compacted or worn bare pose a real problem. These areas include the middles of the practice fields, the intramural fields, soccer goal areas and the area where the band continually marches in the same place. These high-wear areas are aerated, have amended soil used to fill in low, wornout spots and topdressed. Aeration is performed at least three times during the summer season. Matting is performed to break up the cores and to help smooth out the fields. They are overseeded with a mix of Manhattan perennial ryegrass, Kentucky bluegrasses and some fine fescue. A mulch, and sometimes netting, is used to hold seed and moisture in place. This maintenance has to be performed on half of the fields at a time because of the constant use. It is not always done at the right time or under ideal conditions but every effort is made to keep grass on these play surfaces.