

Step-By-Step Baseball Field Construction

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With all of the expertise available today to turfgrass people, one is constantly amazed to find so little attention given to that critical area of an athletic field known as the skinned area. Although particularly common to a baseball field, the skinned area is many times a critical area on multi-use fields for the part of the year when football and baseball are played in the same area.

How many games are called off due to a wet infield when the turf areas are fine? How many bad bounces and bad throws are caused by wet infields? The answers are obvious - many - and the problems have existed since sports fields and arenas were developed.

There has always been sort of a trade-off in infield construction. The true bounce, the nice sliding surface and synonymous with a sand clay blend. But the problem with these surfaces has been poor drainage. Onto the market came the soil additives, soil substitutes and soil enhancers. Crushed or decomposed granite had some west coast baseball infielders wearing mouthpieces. Calcined clay and crushed brick even had John Madden commenting on how football players hated to get tackled on the skinned infield areas in the multi-use stadiums because they like sandpaper. And to take this one step further, there are the infields constructed with agricultural lime. One will always play and the hospital emergency rooms and uniform manufacturers will love the fact that agricultural lime is being used.

So what is the answer?

If one is player-oriented the grounds have to be tailored to the best playing condition for true bounces, sliding and playing the game as it was meant to be played. However, as previously mentioned, wetness takes a toll on the playing conditions. Therefore, the answer lies in controlling the wetness.

If one can locate the entire skinned area three to four inches from a drain then one has a good chance of controlling wetness. This can be done as follows:

1. Excavate the entire skinned area to a depth of 12 inches.
2. Insert three to four inch drain lines (pipe) with a sleeve or use special piping to handle sand without a sleeve and establish the proper drainage pattern.
3. Add eight inches of a uniform sand over the entire skinned area.
4. Cover with a geotextile material specially designed to allow water but not soil fines to move through material.
5. Add sand and clay to the top three to four inches over the geotextile material.

When the above steps are followed one might want to add a wetting agent, calcined clay or whatever to the surface of the infield. But is should be kept in mind that three to four inches down from the surface there is an eight inch subsurface layer comprised of good drainable sand which acts like a dry sponge. If these steps are followed it won't be long until the umpire calls out "Play ball."



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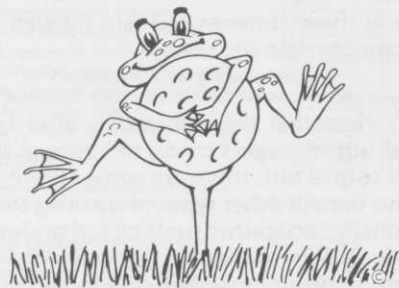
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