

How Do You Do...?

The Question -- How Do You Increase Field Playability and Use During Weather Extremes?

Answered by Rick Jurries, West Ottawa (MI) Public Schools

The first thing that we try to do is plan and coordinate with everyone that uses the field BEFORE the extreme weather hits. That way, no matter what the conditions, extreme frost in the morning, heavy rain the night before, or drought-like conditions, they already know that their games will either be postponed or cancelled -- depending on the extreme.

We have been pretty dry this year, but we do have a good irrigation system. Since we aren't allowed to water here during peak hours, we do a heavy watering in the evenings. During the summer we do not aerify at all as that dries out the field that much quicker, and we raise mowing heights. We also try to limit field usage during extreme weather. This year we are doing a 3-day soccer tournament for the Lakeshore United Soccer League but, for the most part, we save the field strictly for school sponsored events. That way we can have it in the best possible condition for use.

Answered by Mickey Landry, City of Colleyville (TX)

Part of the success of our fields, I feel, has to do with the initial construction and how well the drainage aspect was considered. I also am very pleased with the grass on our fields, all of which are Tifway 419 bermudagrass.

As far as the field maintenance aspect goes, we aerify twice a month and mow to 1.5 inches a minimum of once a week. Our fertilization program is industry-standard and we fluctuate our irrigation schedule to be consistent with the weather. For the baseball and softball fields, infield conditioners and drying agents are vital components.

We also are strict in our regulation of field usage. On the soccer fields, as well as baseball and softball, we will wait until 4:00 PM to make a final decision on play if there was, or is, a chance of rain. If rain occurs over the weekend, a City field representative will come out and inspect and make the recommendation on whether to play or not. To control access, the fields are kept locked when not in use and only maintenance personnel have keys.

I believe that the most important thing is to keep your fields in their best condition possible. It takes less time to keep them in top condition than it does to repair them after the damage is done.

Answered by Matt Johns, North Thurston (WA) School District

That's a very good question considering that in

the first 3 months of the year, we've had more than 3 times our normal amount of rain (including one 45 day stretch). Since most of our fields are sand-based, they did a pretty good job of draining once the rain stopped.

We did put down a polyon/nitrogen fertilizer April 1st, and are getting someone to come in and do a deep-tine aeration on the areas that are sealed over. When we mow, we leave minimal clippings this time of year to prevent areas from sealing over. We do our equipment maintenance check weekly to insure sharp blades, and change mowing directions (it surprises the grass and dandelions; they don't know which way we're coming from).

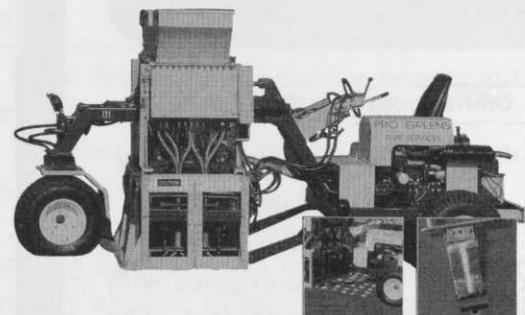
The most important practices are to walk your fields weekly so you know where your problem areas are. Check the rootzones for damage, especially in wet areas. Keep very detailed notes, and educate your staff to make sure they know what to look for and how and when to report it. Most of all, *continued on page 15*

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Doc's Dugout

continued from page 9

and consulting on fields -- he instigated other venues to improve field conditions.

One of these efforts involved the national PTA organization. Working with their Program Director, Dr. Carter, Grau helped form the initial concept, "BAT TRITTY" (Better Athletic Turf - To Reduce Injuries To The Young).

This concept gave way to PTA/PTI and eventually to the National Sports Turf Council which met biannually at the USDA Research facility in Beltsville, Maryland, and included many major industry groups: STMA (represented by Kent Kurtz), The Lawn Institute (Roberts), the NFLPA (Macik),

PGMS (Shoulders), USDA (Murray), commercial companies (Watson, etc.), the University of Maryland (Turner), Virginia Polytechnic (Hall), Penn State University (Harper & Waddington) and others.

By 1984, The National Sports Turf Council was acting to coordinate efforts to improve turf and playing surfaces primarily of fields at the elementary, junior and high school levels. The PTA/PTI and National Sports Turf Council never reached their potential due to the deaths of Dr. Fred Grau and Jack Murray and they no longer exist. The challenge remains and addressing it is part of the STMA outreach.



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continued from page 6

communicate with your Athletic Directors. SHOW them the conditions, make them put their boots on and come splash around with you so they know exactly what you're working with.

Answered by Alan Dungey, Frontier Field (NY)

Strong cultural practices are the first defense for any field which experiences extreme weather conditions. In the Northeast, we experience long harsh winters, cold spring night temperatures and, in the hot summer months, the only precipitation is heavy rain storms.

Spring play begins when fields are dormant, so any repairs or renovations must be done in the fall. Aeration and fertilization in the fall help ensure a healthy, well draining field for spring. Evergreen turf blankets can be used for high traffic areas to help control ice damage and promote earlier spring green up. All skinned areas should be prepared in the fall so the only efforts in the spring are to dry the field.

We rely on our fields for heavy use during any weather. When we attempt to play in poor weather, we try not to over react to a problem; it often looks worse than it is. Making the field playable when you have to use it is the focus. You can cause more harm to a field by trying to provide optimal conditions. When the weather changes back to normal, you then have to work harder to get the field back to normal. The toughest decision is whether to jeopardize the field's future for the event that day.

