

"It Takes More Than Sneakers" by Jim Hermann¹

As we explore the area of infield maintenance, we find ourselves inundated with products and procedures designed to provide professional results. When reading these articles and advertisements always ask yourself about the similarities in your field *environment* and the *environment* you are reading about.

A problem with infield maintenance is that many of us are looking for that perfect product that will minimize maintenance along with increasing the quality of the field. In many cases an increase in quality can also serve to minimize maintenance. However, the maintenance that remains becomes more essential.

An example of this would be the procedure of modifying the pitchers mound with clay. Damage caused by the pitcher is minimized, thereby increasing the quality of the mound and decreasing the time necessary to maintain it. However the maintenance required becomes more imperative. Once a pitchers mound is modified with clay it should be kept covered when not in play. A higher level of expertise is necessary for maintenance. If the mound is not covered and maintained properly any depressions created by the pitcher become wet and sticky. The only thing worse than wet clay on your cleats is dog *shhhhhhhhhame* on me.

On a similar note, if you increase the clay content of your infield mix, you minimize the time necessary to maintain the infield in a safe and playable condition. The clay content causes the mix to become more stable. The mix has less potential to translocate to the perimeters and create that lip we are all so familiar with. On the other hand, the infield mix will have the potential to become much harder when it is dry and hold more water during rainy weather than an infield mix containing a higher percentage of sand. This causes a greater need for a more timely and effective maintenance program.

A great deal of caution and judgment needs to be exercised as you continue to search for effective products. There are many products available that are very effective in accomplishing what the manufacturer states they will accomplish. However, they need to be used within the *environment* for which they are intended in order to be most effective.

Ask yourself these questions:

1. Can I cover the infield when it rains?
2. Can I water the infield when it's dry?
3. Can I roll the infield when it's soft?
4. Can I scarify the infield when it's hard?

Have you ever heard this statement? "We use the same infield mix they use at So and So Stadium." That's like saying "I wear Michael Jordan sneakers." It's just not the same.

It should not be assumed that failure is eminent if the means are not provided to address the four questions posed. What should be understood is that we need to live within our means, so to speak. It makes little sense to anticipate a level of quality that demands a maintenance program that is unattainable. The quality of your program is not a direct result of the products you use, but more a direct result of how you use those products. Take care when purchasing a product or

service that you have the ability to provide the *environment* necessary to achieve the benefit that you anticipate.

When you make decisions on the products and procedures you include in your maintenance program remember this, **"It takes more than sneakers."**

The quality of your program is not a direct result of the products you use, but more a direct result of how you use those products.

Although it is true, you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. You can have the finest silk available, but without the proper tools, equipment and knowledge; you will never create that silk purse.

The best way to gain the knowledge necessary in making educated decisions on equipment and procedures used in athletic field maintenance is to become an active member of SFMANJ. This membership puts you in touch with people in your area who have similar interests. By networking with these people through involvement in tradeshow, field days and seminars you will have the opportunity to learn first hand what works and also what doesn't work in athletic field maintenance. Involvement allows you to profit from the experience of others. This is an invaluable asset.

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¹, SFMANJ Board of Directors

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