

SERIOUS SOCCER

Northbrook goes bulk for soccer field nutrition

The residents of Northbrook, Illinois take soccer seriously. The Northbrook Park District soccer fields are used all year except for baseball season. Some fields are even used for night games.

When Mike Schiller, director of parks/facilities maintenance, took his job three years ago, the soccer fields presented an unusual challenge. Today, natural turf is beating the soccer players, except for goal areas. "My goal is to grow turf in soccer goal areas someday," says Schiller.

Northbrook backed Schiller up when he advised all soccer fields needed to be improved. With the support of his boss, Tim Miles, Schiller launched a five-year program to show soccer fans what soccer fields can be with proper knowledge and funding.

An intensive program of aeration, fertilization, and overseeding has vastly improved the fields. The Northbrook fields are now used as an example of good athletic field management by local and national groups.

Schiller is the first to admit much of the advice received from local experts. He presented his goals to James Halloran of Arthur Cleson Inc., a supplier in Wheeling, IL, and Mark Grundman of Northrup King. They were to achieve a constant growth of turf to avoid periods of weak turf or excessive

growth and to cut the number of times fertilizer bags were handled down from three. He also needed to correct compacted soils.

Taking their advice and adding it to his own knowledge derived from a degree in park operation management from Harper College

Schiller describes his soccer field program during a seminar held in Northbrook last fall.

Northbrook receives (below) custom-blended fertilizer in 4½-ton trailer.



NORTHBROOK

in Pallatine, IL, and five years as parks superintendent at Libertyville, IL, Schiller began a custom bulk fertilizer program combined with aerification and overseeding four times per year.

The fertilizer is custom blended through Cleson by IMC. It is delivered to Northbrook in a 4½-ton auger trailer. A 4½-ton trailer spreader is loaded from the trailer. All Northbrook has to do is provide a tractor to pull and drive the PTO spreader and a driver. Northbrook no longer needs to handle bags of fertilizer. Schiller says 95 hours of labor are saved each year this way.

The fertilizer is rated 25-5-14.5. The nitrogen is half urea and half Nitroform. The phosphorus is Diammonium Phosphate and the potash is Sulphate of Potash. It is applied at 4 lbs. per 1,000 square feet four times per year. This program has provided constant turf growth and allowed Schiller to schedule mowing much more efficiently.

Four times a year the fields are aerified and dragged with a Huerst Flexible Tine Harrow. Topdressing is done twice each year in heavy traffic areas. In addition, the fields are overseeded with a Jacobsen Aeroblade Overseeder with a mix of Rugby and Parade Kentucky bluegrasses and NK-200 and Delray perennial ryegrasses. This mix is called NK Medalist North.

None of the fields are irrigated. So Schiller uses a penetrant from Precision Labs of Northbrook. He uses AquaGro on the park districts golf course.

Herbicides are applied in spring and fall, with spot treatments when needed. Trimec is the primary herbicide used with Methar 30 when needed. The penetrant is applied with the herbicides and iron for color.

Many of the systems used for the soccer fields have been moved over to the 27-hole golf course under Schiller's supervision. The

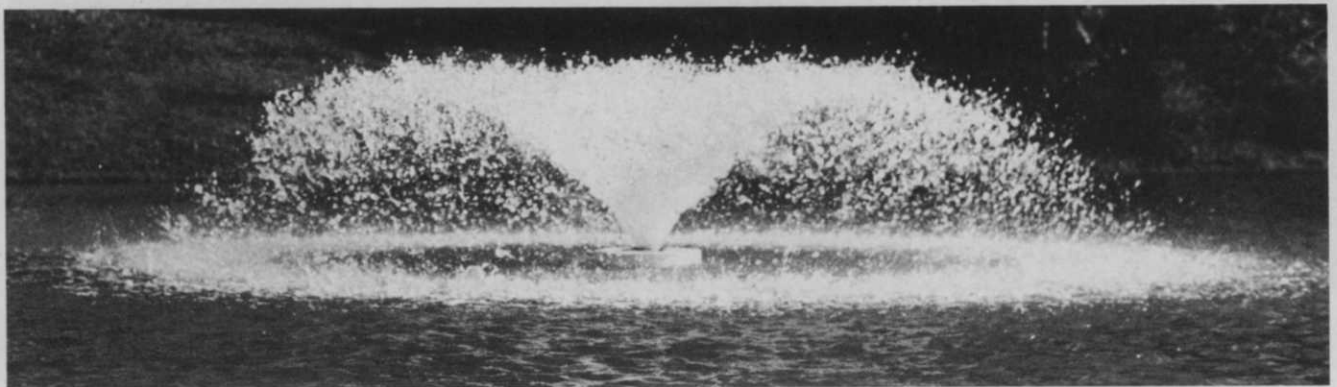
soccer fields are just a step to a larger overall goal to provide recreation to Northbrook citizens. "The people in our district are very recreation-minded," says Schiller.

Soccer players have good fields without artificial turf or without massive reconstruction.

"And the Park board has an excellent relationship with the village government." Illinois has created special tax districts for parks so cooperation is essential.

"Our plans include a clubhouse for the golf course, a miniature golf course, and improving the driving range." Ten soccer fields and 20 baseball fields, added to the golf course, make Schiller's job a big one.

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