

The Cincinnati Bengals professional football team counts on a local maintenance company to give it good practice conditions at Spinney Field.

'Practicing' Class

by Ron Hall, assistant editor



Bengals work out on two-year-old PAT facility at Spinney Field in Cincinnati, OH

Not exactly chump change \$28,000, not even in the megabucks world of professional sports. It buys a lot of turf maintenance on the Cincinnati Bengals practice fields at Spinney Field.

The Bengals management feels it might be the finest practice facility in the National Football League. The two-year-old Prescription Athletic Turf (PAT) field is cared for by a private Cincinnati company, Motz Environmental Services. The adjoining synthetic grass practice field is just a year old.

Money counts

Contrast this with the \$1,600 the schools at Goshen, IN, budget for the

**"You can't aerate
too much"**

—Motz

care of their football fields. The dollar might be the single greatest variable in the equation of providing athletes

with safe playing conditions, not that it always tells the complete story.

"I think we provide excellent conditions at our fields on a reasonable budget. As a taxpayer, I know this is appreciated," says Richard Kercher who advises in the care and maintenance at Goshen's Foreman Field, one of the first PAT fields built about 12 years ago. Kercher's efforts are voluntary. That's often the way it is in many budget-strapped schools and park departments.

The gulf between the care of professional and playground sports fields

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seems to be widening regardless of the number of athletes using them or the amount of wear they receive. The numbers that count are \$\$\$ numbers.

Barney Barron, superintendent of parks in San Francisco, last fall provided members of the Sports Turf Managers Association with a comparison.

Candlestick Park, home of the San Francisco Giants professional baseball team, is maintained by a four-

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man crew and budgeted \$75,000 for supplies. The turf is mowed three times weekly, aerated four to six times annually, fertilized every seven to 21 days (or as needed), and treated with fungicides as a preventative measure every 10 to 21 days. In six months 81 games are played there.

In contrast, a typical ball diamond in a San Francisco park might host 81 games in four weeks, is mowed weekly, aerated once, fertilized twice, and is treated with fungicides on a remedial basis only. The combined budget for all park diamonds is \$165,000. Significantly, Candlestick brings in revenues of about \$1 million while the public diamonds don't generate enough cash to cover their expenses.

Big business

Professional sport is a business with television contracts exceeding the GNP of some third-world nations and almost incomprehensible salaries. Organizations view the health of players as an investment, and professional teams like the Bengals cast an exacting eye to practice fields. They'll pay for professional service.

"It's worked out quite well for the Bengals," says Joe Motz. "Our contract has come up for renewal twice and they've had two opportunities to look at it. They're very shrewd business people."

Motz (pronounced like "most")

came on site in August 1983, shortly after the sand-concept PAT field was constructed by Dixie Irrigation, Louisville, KY. Actually the PAT concept field with its sub-surface irrigation covers 2.3 acres of Spinney Field, an area considerably larger than a football field.

The turf, a combination of five different varieties of Kentucky bluegrass, is kept full by spot seeding with a mix of sand, Michigan peat, and perennial ryegrass. Pre-germinated perennial ryegrass, a trick borrowed from Kansas City groundskeeper George Toma, is used when time is a factor. "Toma's pre-germination tactics were a tremendous boost to the entire industry," says Motz, a 1977 graduate of Ohio State University.

The turf field is mowed weekly with self-propelled reel mowers. Tupersan is used as pre-emergence (usually in conjunction with seeding), and this season Motz says he will be using eight pounds of nitrogen 4-1-2 (he used 12 the first season) to feed the grass.

The PAT field requires special handling, Motz relates, including lots of aeration "to prevent sealing off the surface" and the addition of tons of sand. "You can't aerate too much. We go four to six passes and then we bring in 40 to 45 tons of sand to fill in the cores," says Motz. "We pour a tremendous amount of sand onto our fields."

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—Motz

As far as irrigation, Motz believes in letting the turf "call for water" before turning on the sprinklers. Spinney is equipped with both sub-surface and surface irrigation. "You don't want the turf too lush," he says, "but you've got to have it moist enough that it provides firm footing."

Motz says the agreement his company has with the Bengals is mutually beneficial. The \$28,000 cost also includes the cost of maintaining 3/4 acres of perimeter area and marking the fields on a bi-monthly schedule.

"We feel the practice facility should be in just as good shape, or better, than the playing field," he says. **WT&T**