

TOUCHING ALL BASES

Incorporating an amusement park with a baseball complex provides plenty of maintenance curve balls under the Florida sun.



Boardwalk & Baseball will cover 135 acres of the Central Florida tourist mecca near Orlando.

by Jeff Sobul, assistant editor

*I beat the drum and hold the phone,
the sun came out today.
We're born again;
there's new grass on the field.
Roundin' third and headin' for home,
it's a brown-eyed handsome man.
Anyone can understand the way I feel.
Put me in coach.
I'm ready to play, today.*

—John Fogerty
"Centerfield"

Fogerty's lyrics demonstrate the popularity of baseball. And the dozens of amusement parks across the country are prolific money-makers. But combining them into one park?

At first glance, the concept seems an odd one: molding the traditional elements of an amusement park—rides, an arcade, shows, etc.—with six major league-size baseball diamonds, including a 5,500 to 7,000 seat stadium.

Considering it again, though, the concept is really rather innovative.

Boardwalk & Baseball brings these two American traditions together into one theme park.

Formerly Circus World, the park is located in the Orlando area, America's amusement park mecca. The park's theme, this molding of traditions, and the park's unique landscaping promise to bring visitors back.

Beating the heat

Part of the problem with Circus World, according to Boardwalk & Baseball horticulture manager Paul Shaw, was that the park offered no protection from the often intense heat of the Florida sun. Not only were there few trees, but the park floor was almost entirely asphalt, subjecting park visitors to a "skillet effect." By day's end, guests were literally fried.

Steps are being taken to alleviate this problem.

More than a mile of the asphalt paths will be covered with an authentic boardwalk of jarrahwood, a native of western Australia, layed down on aluminum frames. The sturdy reddish-brown wood (it has a lifespan of 50 years), which turns gray after a short time, is naturally resistant to the elements, fungus and pests, and needs no chemical treatment or varnish.

Topping off the park's heat resistance efforts are, of course, trees. Shaw (who has worked at the park five years) and his staff must maintain more than 2,500 trees. "Any oak tree, any palm tree, any type of tree on the premises, was planted here," Shaw says.

In preparation for the plantings, tons of asphalt from the old park were replaced with soil. Shaw's crews also had trouble moving larger trees through the park, and then had to contend with the summer heat when trying to maintain them. As a result, the

park will have two wells to help meet its high water needs.

Patrons of the park, however, should be appreciative. In all, the trees should provide about 70 percent more shade than previously existed.

Colorful carpet

Thousands of flowers will surround the trees and line the boardwalk.

The nursery crew, part of the horticulture staff, plans on three plantings a year, using about 200,000 annuals in 30 varieties. "I don't like to get monotonous. I don't like a lot of one thing. I like a large variety of textures, colors, sizes and shapes," Shaw says.

Many of the flowers are being kept in a greenhouse on-site and will be the last material planted. In addition to flower gardens, the park will have cactus gardens, blue vase juniper hedges and shrubs. "There will be color everywhere," Shaw comments. Warren's TerraCover, a polyester geotextile, will be layed between the sides of the boardwalk and flower beds to prevent sand from eroding into the boardwalk.

In a section of the park called the Oasis, foliage will be used as a noise insulator, isolating an area with a pond and fountains that can accommodate about 300 visitors at a time. Trees will line the area to keep park noise out, and classical music will be piped in. The area will be quiet, colorful and fragrant.

'Royal' treatment

When visitors have ridden the rides but still want more excitement, the baseball fields are located just past a bridge over the roller coaster.

Fogerty's line, "there's new grass on the field," is certainly accurate for the diamonds. Sod for the two fields that will be ready for the spring opening was being layed down in January and February. (A third field may also be ready for the opening.) The remaining fields, those in the cloverleaf, will be completed by the spring of 1988, just in time for the Kansas City Royals to begin spring training.

As a result, says director of baseball Floyd Perry, the fields must be in immaculate shape. With the Royals has come the assistance of George Toma, the team's field director and a 40-year green industry veteran.

Toma taught Mike Hurd, Boardwalk & Baseball's full-time field supervisor, as much as he could during Hurd's five-day visit to Kansas City last year. Toma has advised the architects and says the park will have an "excellent facility."



Horticulture manager Paul Shaw advises two of his nursery staffers in one of two greenhouses on site.

Toma stresses the importance of the practice fields ("More time is spent playing on those. Many people forget that.") and the infield dirt. "In baseball, a lot of people think the grass is the most important part of the infield," he comments. "It's not the grass. It's the dirt. You have four guys playing on it."

This emphasis is expressed in a meticulous field management program that pays particular attention to the condition of the infield. It will be dragged and smoothed a number of

areas.

Perry notes, "the 40-foot deep sand base that we have will be topped with a Florida peat, mixed specifically for moisture retention" by the contractor, Central Florida Turf in Avon Park. "(They) say this is the best mixture for the soil we have."

To further meet major league baseball's high level of quality, warning tracks on the stadium and Royals' practice field (the 1,500 seater) will be made of an expensive New Jersey aggregate used in many major league parks.

Perry envisions the park becoming the hub of amateur baseball in the region. Already for 1987, Perry has commitments to host a game with the South Florida Major League All-Stars, as well as a spring senior showcase for area high school stars. The minor league Royals will be in town over July 4th weekend to introduce the area to the team.

The Royals will play 16 games in the larger stadium (field two will also seat about 1,500 people in bleachers) during a 1 1/2-month spring training period in March and April. When they leave, around April 15, a Class A team will begin an 80-home game schedule. "In 1988, starting March 1st, we already have 96 dates plugged in. We have to fill in between these slots.

"We've had proposals on the table for old timers games; we've had proposals on the table for fantasy camps; we've had proposals for youth tournaments of 16- and 17-year olds," he adds. "So we've had proposals. It's

'I like a large variety of textures, colors, sizes and shapes'

—Paul Shaw

times before and after games and practices.

Toma's philosophy consists of three points: "First, give the best possible field for the players to perform on. Second, create a field of beauty for the fans and television. And, third, do it without taking money out of the owner's pocket." It is possible, he adds.

Hurd and his seven-man crew have worked long weeks to meet these criteria and prepare the fields, which will host a number of events in 1987. The outfield and infield will be Tifway 419 bermudagrass, with bahiagrass covering the out-of-play

now up to us to see which ones are best for our park. There's enough baseball here."

Baseball fans will be able to attend games without entering the park, and park visitors can attend games at no extra charge, except for the Royals' home games, which will have a small surcharge. In addition to the six fields, batting cages are being erected for both guests and the teams.

And when the sun comes out on Boardwalk & Baseball this spring, everyone will be ready to play. **WT&T**



As director of baseball, Floyd Perry has the task of scheduling events around the major and minor league Royals.

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A NATURAL UMBRELLA



Boardwalk & Baseball will have enough trees to keep visitors cool

The project was a monumental one: transporting nearly 2,000 trees to Boardwalk & Baseball, storing them before planting, and then keeping them alive under the blazing Florida summer sun.

For horticulture manager Paul Shaw and his crew, it has been a series of challenges. Preparing for the plantings was a task in itself. "What they did when they built (Circus World)," Shaw jokes, "was fill the surface completely with lime rock and then they cut out where they wanted plantings.

"We've had such a lime rock problem, we actually mined it all out and put in good soil," Shaw explains. Along with that, the staff has had to contend with the aluminum frames layed down for the boardwalk, which have made it difficult to get the larger trees into the park. "We can't go on the boardwalk. It won't support the weight. So we have to try to find alternate routes."

The trees are transported through the park by means of a special padded forklift which keeps the bark from being stripped off.

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The padded forklift safely places one of the 2,000 trees into its new, seven-foot-wide home. (Photo courtesy of Boardwalk & Baseball.)

A new home

"When we prepare an area for a tree, we dig the hole 1½ times larger than the original (root) ball, and we incorporate Milorganite so there is no danger of burning the tender roots when they come out," Shaw explains.

"When we backfill the holes we use a process called jetting in," Shaw says.

The process involves taking a six-foot-long rod with a water hose on the end and probing around the tree, injecting water to help remove damaging air pockets. "It works well down here because the sand collapses so well into the air pockets with water added to them."

He has three staffers who do nothing but water and jet-in trees behind the planters.

"Approximately two weeks after they're planted, we come back and

build a bowl around the root ball out of soil and drench the root ball with Vaughan's Master Blend liquid fertilizer and Chipco 26019. And that usually makes the trees just snap, really go fast."

40 days and 40 nights

Due to the park's planned spring opening, many of the trees had to be planted during the middle of summer, not an ideal time.

To avoid desiccation and give the trees a chance to take root, they required almost constant watering from an irrigation system that was designed in-house.

"Anything to do with horticulture, we do in house," Shaw says. "It never fails that if we contract something out we have to go back later and correct it. We learned a long time ago it's better to do it yourself."

Water risers (hoses) are hooked to the top of the trees, providing a constant spray to the leaves. The risers remain in place for two months. More than three miles of flexible tubing has been used so far.

"If it wasn't for that system, this would just revert back to a scrub area," Shaw comments. "That's how much we depend on irrigation."

"The only thing we've had problems with as far as survival rates are our pine trees. Pines you just don't move in the summer. We spray them with a preservative (Vapor Guard), a coating solution to stop transpiration, but when you plant pines in July, they just don't have a good mortality rate. Out of 1,500 pines we've lost close to 100."

In all, they have lost only 103 trees of the 2,000 planted. The park eventually will have nearly 3,000 trees.

—Jeff Sobul

GOING THE DISTANCE FOR THE ROYALS

Maintaining one baseball field at a high level of quality was never considered easy. But six?

This is the task Boardwalk & Baseball horticulture manager Paul Shaw and field supervisor Mike Hurd find in front of them.

"Two of the fields—the major league practice field with 1,500 bleacher seats and one of the cloverleaf fields—will be ready when the park opens April 4th, about the same time the major league baseball season opens. The 5,500-7,000 seat stadium will be ready for use in February, 1988.

The remainder will be ready for the spring of 1988, when the park begins at least a 10-year stint hosting the Kansas City Royals spring training, and the Royals' Class A minor league affiliate.

Turfgrass maintenance

Outfields and infields for all six fields will be Tifway 419 bermudagrass, except for the stadium infield, which will be artificial turf, the Royals' normal playing surface. Infields on the four practice fields in the cloverleaf will be cut at 5/8 inches, outfields at 3/4 inches. The stadium outfield will be cut at 5/8 inches.

"We will not have a set schedule for mowing because frequency of mowing must be related to the rate of growth rather than to a time schedule," Shaw says. "Each time a field is mowed, it will be mowed in a different direction than the time before to prevent the 'washboard' effect." Grass clippings will be removed each time the field is mowed, Shaw adds.

For spectator appeal, the stadium's outfield will be mowed so that it will create a diamond pattern, a common practice on many major league fields that have games televised.

Shaw hopes to maintain a 14-inch percolation rate by

eliminating thatch build-up. Hurd will topdress with masonry sand, verticuting three to five times a year and aerifying three times a year.

He and Hurd will try to limit herbicide use through proper cultural practices. "Even selective herbicide reduces the hardness of plant material," Shaw comments. "We avoid its use as much as possible. We find that proper fertilization, irrigation and maintenance will prevent most weeds.

"We will use herbicides routinely on bermuda for the first year. Thereafter we will reduce herbicide use as much as possible and rely on cultural practices." Ronstar will be used for pre-emergence control after the sod is established, with back up as needed from pronamide acetates and asulam.

A regular weed control program won't be used on the bahiagrass in areas outside the field of play. "We treat spot problems," Shaw says. Roundup will be used for edging, Trimec for areas with dollar weed during spring and fall.

The fields will have a two-month schedule rotating Daconil, Chipco 26019 and terrachlor.

Pesky mole crickets

"We have three swarms of mole crickets per year in our area. Oftanol-laden fertilizer will be applied in early May, July and September," Shaw says.

He adds that treatment for other pests will be done as needed. Visual inspections will be performed daily on baseball fields for pests and diseases.

All the chemicals will be stored on sight in the park's EPA-approved storage facility. In addition, the park has its own soil analysis lab, and will do all horticulture-related work on-site.

—Jeff Sobul