

TIPS FROM THE PROS

When you've got the best baseball and football players in the world playing on your turf, it had better be the best turf in the world.

The checkered pattern of the grass at Cleveland Stadium becomes more defined when continually cross-cut.

In the "old days," the talk was about how baseball fields could be maintained to influence the outcome of a game. Today, professional athletic turf managers concentrate on getting the best playing surface, not on trying to gimmick a field to influence play.

"The greatest influence you can have is on the speed of the ball," says David Frey, who handles the field at Cleveland (Ohio) Stadium. Grass density, mowing height and grain all affect how fast a field plays.

"But anything you do to influence play can work against you," Frey adds. "Let's say you've got a pitcher who tends to be hit on the ground. You can cut higher to slow the ball down, but the opposing team can see that and bunt successfully.

Frey considers the attractive striping pattern he gets on his field especially important for television. Frey says that it is important to mow regularly, so that no more than one-third of the grass blade is cut off at any one time.

Actually, most of the changes we make are with the dirt," says Frey. "Topdressing will slow the ball down some, just as adding moisture or softening up the dirt slows things down."

Field condition is Frey's main concern, and adequate drainage—especially surface drainage—plays an important role.

"If you're spending money on a field," says Frey, "it's more important to end up with a proper grade than to install subsurface drainage. A proper grade will keep water moving off the

field, so you don't end up with compacted areas and puddles."

At Milwaukee County (Wisc.) Stadium, veteran Harry Gill agrees that anything done to affect play can work against you as well as for you. Other than occasionally orienting infield grain one direction or the other at the team's request, his "tricks" involve growing grass and managing dirt for optimal playing conditions.

One of Gill's favorite practices involves overseeding. He broadcasts seed over high-wear areas of the football field or baseball outfield just before games so that players push the seed into the ground with their spikes. Gill takes pride in getting free use of these high-priced "seeders."

Players digging in around home plate and carving out landing areas in front of the pitcher's mound are more of a problem.

"You don't want someone getting a broken ankle sliding into a hole at home plate," says Gill, "and some of these guys will dig in up to their knees if you let them."

To deter the players' excavating tendencies, Gill has his grounds crew place hard-packed clay bricks two inches below the soil surface in these areas. They make the bricks by combining two types of clay soil with a coarser material, watering the mixture, packing it into cake tins, and setting these in the sun to dry.

Gill uses his best clay on the mound and around home plate. For the basepaths, he uses a mixture of 50 percent sharp sand, 30 percent clay loam and 20 percent pure clay.

"We do a lot of watering during the day before a game," says Gill. "We keep the basepaths just short of mud."

Gill applies slow-release fertilizer every seven weeks. "It's about eight weeks to full bloom, with a total cycle of 14 weeks," says Gill. We mow every day with a Jacobsen Trim King, keep the clippings short and leave them on the field, because 70 percent of the fertilizer goes into the leaves and returns to the soil through the clippings."

Mowing patterns

Gill's triplex operators follow three different mowing patterns. Gill says that they maintain a pretty regular rotation of these five patterns, but admits to changing the rotation occasionally for television coverage or "because we're just feeling 'ornery' one day."

Nothing draws people's attention to the quality of a natural sports field than the beautiful striped or checkered pattern created by mowing. It takes a quality reel mower and an experienced operator to create this professionally finished "television coverage" look.

In his nine years at Cleveland Stadium, Ed Shaner has seen several triplex mowers come and go. His last one had fixed reels with no front rollers and a manual reel lift.

"I had to stay on the grass on turns," he says. "I couldn't get the straight-edge striping from the infield to the warning track, and it still scalped the grass along the edges."

Before that, he used an old hydraulic trimming mower.

"The seat was too high," says

Shaner, adding that the low seat of the Jacobsen Tri-King 1471 gives him a better viewing angle for accurate striping.

That checkered look

To get the checkered pattern at the stadium, he first cross-cuts the field parallel to one foul line, laying down one set of stripes. The next day, he cross-cuts along the other foul line, striping at a 90-degree angle to the first cut.

Shaner makes striping the field look easy, but on each cross-cutting turn he must steer, adjust traction speed, and raise and lower the reels—all within the space of a couple of seconds. In this case, the mower makes his job easier.

Striping accuracy depends on lining up precisely with the foul line and maintaining a consistent amount of overlap on succeeding passes. He corrects the pattern midway through by sighting down a line running through second base from either first or third base while mowing in from the outfield.

After Shaner establishes the mowing pattern with his first two cuts, he simply "drives between the lines" on subsequent cuttings. By following the same direction of cut, the striping intensifies as the season goes on.



The field at Municipal Stadium in Cleveland is mowed regularly, so that no more than one-third of the grass blade is cut off at any one time.

The dramatic checkered mowing pattern created with the Trim-King draws people's attention to the high-quality turf at Cleveland Stadium. At other sports fields, the striking,

"ready-for-prime-time" look assures everyone—from spectators and players, to team owners or school board members—that this is professionally maintained turf. **LM**

Another tip: water removal system

David Frey of Cleveland Stadium swears by his Super Sopper. His what?

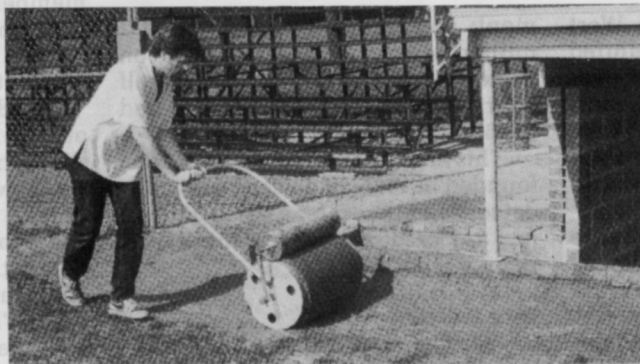
"During a concert last year, we got a lot of rain," Frey remembers. "If we didn't have a Super Sopper, we wouldn't have been able to play football the next day."

The Super Sopper is a water removal system that works like a giant sponge.

Attached to a metal drum that can be ridden, pulled by a tractor or walked behind (depending on size) is a cylinder of special foam. When rolling the unit over standing water, the foam sucks up the water and deposits it in the middle of the drum for easy disposal.

Super Soppers have been successfully used at the 1988 LPGA Crestar Classic, the 1987 Little League World Series and the 1987 American League Playoffs in Detroit. In a Miami-Buffalo NFL game in 1987, a Marlin model removed 20,000 gallons of water in four hours prior to kick-off.

According to Mike Harding, president of Kuranda USA, the Super Sopper has been marketed in North America only 1½ years even though it was invented in Australia in the mid-70s.



The Super Sopper, from Kuranda USA, uses a foam center to absorb and efficiently remove water from virtually any athletic surface.

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One of the beauties of the Super Sopper is that it can be used on any surface from turfgrass to asphalt without harming either itself or the surface. It can pick up to one inch of standing water with just one pass.

Though it hasn't caught on among golf course superintendents yet, the Super Sopper has applications in that market.

"One of the worst possible golf situations is to have a hot day and then have an inch of rain in one hour," notes Frey. "Before the water drains, it'll cook. But with a Super Sopper, you wouldn't have to worry about that."

The Super Sopper comes in five sizes, from the Marlin that removes up to 100 gallons of water a minute to the Mackerel, a 15-inch diameter drum with a six-gallon tank. The smaller units are especially good for youth baseball diamonds, Harding says.

Super Soppers were used in Seoul, Korea, at the 1988 Olympics. Shea Stadium, Buffalo Bison Stadium and Pimlico Race Track all have them.

Prices range from \$459 for the walk-behind to \$15,000 for the largest riders.