



Brandon Koehnke oversees one full-time worker, four seasonal full-timers and 11 part-time seasonal workers. Jacobs Field turf is 18 feet below street level, which helps keep turf temperatures in the mid-40s from March on.



A groundsman's dilemma: Waiting for 'normal'

Brandon Koehnke, manager of field maintenance at Jacobs Field, anticipates a time when his working conditions become more predictable, even if for one season. Lately, his eye has been on the weather map more than the ball diamond.

"The first year I was here, 1992, there was a lot of snow," Koehnke recalls. "Then we had a warm January and February of '93. Last year it was heat."

In between it all was the baseball strike of 1994.

The ups and downs of irritable weather patterns would be harder to take at an older ballpark, but at the three-year-old home of the Cleveland Indians, it's like a kid taking an aspirin in applesauce. The shiny newness of the structure and deep green of the field serve to energize the will to "hang on, summer's almost here!"

Koehnke has been with the Indians through four seasons as of June 1 of this year. Before he took the job he was stadium manager in Homestead, Fla., former site of the Indians training camp.

This spring's weather, he says, was "different, but

bad." Rain and cold made it tough to get turf primed for heavy play.

Seventy-two irrigation heads are scattered around Jacobs Field, which Koehnke says "drains like a sieve, at a rate of 25 inches of water per hour.

"The infield clay is what makes this field the best in the league," asserts Koehnke. "The mix is 75 percent sand, 25 percent clay, with five tons of Turface calcined clay used on the infield to absorb water."

The field at Jacobs played beautifully for the past two years, but was resodded after the 1995 World Series. It was determined earlier in the season that creeping bentgrass was somehow mixed in with the bluegrass sod.

Below-ground, the field follows USGA greens specs. The all-bluegrass turf is supported by an 80/20 sand/peat mix.

As an added turf manager's perk, the bullpen serves as a sod nursery. Sod is sometimes needed around the pitcher's mound, which receives plenty of wear.

Breaks and headaches

"When the team is in town, we mow everyday," says Koehnke.

"When the team is away, we mow

every two or three days and verticut the field."

Regular verticutting eliminates turf grain, so the ball has a truer bounce.

"We core aerify two times, in spring and fall," says Koehnke. "We use half-inch tines that go three to four inches deep."

As if the weather weren't enough to challenge one's skill and patience, Koehnke says the odd problem has also cropped up here and there. Peanut shells work their way down to the field during pressure spraying of the stands, and glowing embers from home run fireworks often float down and burn a patch in the pretty green outfield.

The upswings help. Such as the fact that insect control on the field has been unnecessary for three years, and disease prevention has been minimal. All that's been needed lately was a minimal application of PCNB for snow mold, and a preventive spray for leaf spot. □

—Terry McIver