

FIT *for a 'World Series'*



L. to R.: Paddy Drimmie, Kirk Felix, Joe Lutz, Mark Carbaugh, Jim Rooker (ABC commentator), Jimmy Scott (coordinator for Little League fields), Don Fowler, David Fowler.

Below, KAFMO volunteer Tim Foreman helped build the pitchers mound. Right, bottom, Alpine Services graded the field.



Pennsylvania sports turf managers volunteer expertise and perspiration to make Little League field a showcase for August's International World Series.

By RON HALL / Managing Editor

For a few days each summer baseball's attention turns to Williamsport in the wooded mountains of north central Pennsylvania. Williamsport is international headquarters of Little League Baseball. Each August, the Little League World Series is played near here. That's when Little League, after 12 games in seven days, crowns a new world champion.

Unlike Major League Baseball, this event truly is

global. Teams from about 90 nations compete for the right to play here each August.

Members of the Keystone Athletic Field Managers Organization (KAFMO) help make the Little League World Series special. Members donate hard-earned expertise and hundreds of man hours to help improve the playing field at Little League's Lamade Stadium.

What KAFMO is accomplishing at Lamade Stadium—and how they're doing it—highlights the specialized

knowledge that turf managers bring to the America's growing love of sport.

"Little League wanted these young baseball players, coming from around the world, to play on the best Little League field in the world," says Don Fowler, one of the KAFMO volunteers.

Companies quick to help

On September 21, 1995, Little League officials and Tom Murphy from the Lycoming County Extension Office met with KAFMO members to discuss renovating the stadium playing field. Little League had already stripped the field and it asked for help. KAFMO volunteers agreed to help, and immediately went to work.

In fact, as they drove from Williamsport that very day, Kurt Nilsson, with Blue Mount Quarry (a regional supplier of diamond mix, mound clay and infield conditioner) enlisted, via car phone, preliminary agreements with sod supplier Hummer Sports Turf, and with Alpine Services, a company spe-



Grove Teates of Alpine Services used a laser to make sure Little League's World Series field drained to the warning track, foul lines.

cializing in grading and field renovations. Four days later both companies signed contracts with Little League Baseball, Inc.

"Other than Beaver Stadium at Penn State, this Little League field is probably the most high profile field in all of the state," says Dan Douglas, KAFMO president and stadium grounds superintendent of the Reading Phillies. "The whole world's attention is on Williamsport, so we committed ourselves to helping it to become the best Little League field in the world."

Time was short. KAFMO and the two contractors had committed themselves to renovating the field yet that fall.

Precise installation

On October 9 Alpine Services began preliminary grading. The field, built on heavy clay, required three inches of good, dry compost, rototilled to a depth of five inches. Alpine precision-graded the field again, using a laser, and sculpted the outfield with a 12-inch crown from second base to centerfield,

so that excess rains drained to the foul lines and to the outfield warning track.

The skin infield required an equally fine touch. Alpine graded to a depth of four inches allowing KAFMO volunteers to put in the infield mix, and to build the pitchers mound and the batters box.

By Oct. 25, Alpine had reconstructed the field, but cold rains stopped work. It wasn't until November 8 that Hummer Turf could cut and deliver about 32,500 square feet of Kentucky bluegrass sod.

On November 9, at 7 a.m., employees of Little League, KAFMO volunteers, and employees from Hummer began laying sod. It snowed lightly. Work continued through lunch and the group finished in one day instead of two it had originally planned. On November 11 four inches of snow fell on Williamsport.

It wasn't until May 7 of 1996 that work resumed on the field. Twenty KAFMO volunteers edged the field, topped



Lycoming County (PA) Extension Agent Tom Murphy, standing, with volunteer Kevin Yeiser, center, and KAFMO President Dan Douglas.

the infield with 0.75 inch of Home Run ball diamond mix, and finished the mound and home plate circle. While volunteers visited the field several times during that summer, it wasn't until August 7 that the finishing touches to the field for the 50th anniversary of the Little League World Series began taking shape.

Five KAFMO members helped remove the top half inch of the infield due to gravel contamination. Five tons of Diamond Pro went down. On August 18, the day before the first four World Series games, the Little League grounds crew of Jimmy Scott, Joe Lutz and Kirk Felix, which had worked hand in hand with KAFMO volunteers, put the final touches on the field, including painting logos.

Four KAFMO volunteers worked with the LL grounds

crew throughout the Series, until the final pitch was thrown. It was hectic, says KAFMO's Don Fowler.

"Sometimes we had 20 minutes between games to prepare the field for the next game but it turned out pretty good.

There weren't any extra-inning games because then they might have had as little as seven minutes to prepare for the next game," he adds.

"The games are televised and the cameras are going to be running, and there's a lot to do, including preparing the mound and putting down the lines for the next game."

Although KAFMO volunteers contributed 792 man hours to making the Lamade Stadium field the "best Little League field in the world," KAFMO volunteers continue to work to make it even better. □