

Field Transitions

Adjusting for multiple sports

by Mike Hebrard

This summer became quite a challenge with transitioning sports fields for me, but not because of the familiar transitions that groundskeepers deal with as seasonal climate changes affect turfgrass growth. **These transitions involved different sports on the same field within days or weeks of each other.**

My first such challenge was with the Third Annual 7ON Football Tournament, held in Beaverton, Ore., in July. During this event, the best high school players in the country compete against each other. My crew and I needed to lay out and paint two football fields, end-to-end, with all the markings in two and a half days. Along with the standard lines, numbers, yard marks and double striping the 20s, I needed to paint a 30-foot 7ON logo at each center field, as well as a logo with 15-foot-tall letters in all four end zones. All the logo painting would be freehand. In the past, the end zones for this tournament were painted entirely with three colors. The key challenge was that two days after the event, Manchester City Soccer Club was scheduled to train at the campus for 10 days. They didn't want any other markings on the field but the soccer lines and their own logo.

After several meetings and test plots, a removable paint, Temp-Line for synthetic fields, was chosen from Eco Chemical out of Seattle, Wash. This product had only been tried on natural grass by the Washington Redskins, but after several grass field uses, it is now available in a grass formulation. The fields were also prepared with a fertilizer to encourage growth that would help mow out any paint that remained after the football tournament. We chose black for the lines as that seemed to come up the best and quickest with the recommended remover. The numbers and yard marks remained white. The 7ON logo was sized so that the Manchester logo would cover most of it.



For the 7ON Football Tournament, both fields included a center field logo and black lines.

Ron Clark, with TruGreen LandCare, who oversees the landscape, orchestrated the removal of the football markings. Their plan was to come in the day following the 7ON and remove the TempLine paint, but due to temperatures reaching 100 degrees, they

brought in portable lighting and worked that same night after the ceremonies were completed to prevent any chemical burn.

They first applied the remover at a 4 percent diluted rate with a boom sprayer and backpack sprayers. They waited approximately 10



As the sod was stripped away, it was loaded onto a rubber-track loader.

minutes after application to start washing off the paint using modified pressure washers. As we had expected, white was the most challenging color to remove, and it took the most time. Once one of the fields was completed, they started mowing that field. They finished all the paint removal and the mowing by 8:30 a.m. Even though they went through several test plots before the actual removal date, removal was slow at the beginning and a little damaging. However, Clark and his 10-person crew soon had the process working like clockwork, which is what it took to get the job done.

I arrived at 9 a.m. and laid out and painted two 70 by 120-yard soccer fields. Sunday morning I returned to paint the Manchester Shield in the center of both fields. I was able to make a stencil by having a local sign company print the logo on 5-foot widths of butcher paper. The painting process went well. There was a little shadowing the first couple of days, but by mowing two times a week, all visible football markings were gone. **Applying fertilizer two weeks before the event was a good decision to enhance rapid turf growth.**

The next challenge came with the Softball Little League World Series that has been held at Alpenrose Dairy in Beaverton Ore., for the last 16 years. In the past, it was played on a grass infield because league baseball games also are played on this site. This year, Owner Carl Cadonau Jr. decided it was time to make the venue a true softball event. Since I've served as tournament head groundskeeper during all that time, Carl asked me to remove the grass from the infield and prepare the surface for a conventional skin infield.

On July 23, after the boys' major tournament was over, the east field was stripped. On July 24, after Tigard won its host spot to the World Series, the main field was stripped. Ideally, I'd have been able to spray out the infield grass using glyphosate, allow it to sit for a week and let the herbicide get into the root system, but time was of the essence, and the removal of the infield grass had to be done right away. We rented a sod cutter to cut the infield turf about 1-inch deep in a 2-foot wide strip in the foul territory grass along the baselines and a 7-foot wide strip along the back arc of the infield, removing all that sod. This allowed the use of a rubber-track loader to pick up the cut sod and take it to a dump area on-site for future use in a fill project.

We then renovated the infield using a tow-behind Aerovator until all of the infield grass area and skin area were the same consistency. We laser-graded the infield with a slight slope from the mound toward center field with a half-percent cone. Fifteen yards of infield dirt (Sandstone) from Astoria, Ore., was brought in to allow for proper grading for a skin infield. We were able to grade a lot of the extra dirt back onto the infield from the back edge lip that we had cut out. The Sandstone was added to the infield using a Turfco tow-behind topdresser.

Once the final grade of the infield skin was completed, we applied 2 tons of Turface MVP using the same method with the topdresser. Within three days the infield was ready for the Little League Softball World Series.

Since the west field is primarily used for practice during the event, we left the grass infield. Because that field tends to get



Turf removal worked from the base path toward the mound as the baseball field is converted for softball.



Most of the sod has been stripped and removed in preparation for the skinned infield for softball.

overlooked with the World Series play, I wanted to whip it into good shape for the Third Annual Challenger Game scheduled for Saturday, August 14. We capped the two irrigation heads in the infield and measured for relocation after the tournament. We moved the two baseline heads to the foul side grass lines for extra watering of the dirt



The infield turf was cut to a 1-inch depth with the sod cutter, and then stripped away in sections.

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if needed. These adjustments and modifications helped provide added coverage, as the skin infield requires different watering techniques. We used Turface's new Pro League Heritage Red in the 8-foot radius mound circle to give a contrast between the infield natural color and the pitcher's mound.

Once the tournament was over, the infield grass had to be reinstalled for the fall boys' Little League play and next season. Since there is a slight grade difference between softball and baseball, we brought the infield grass area to a lower grade so that when it was seeded or sodded the playing surface will be at the same level. The boys' pitching rubber was reinstalled at the 46-foot location and set 6 inches above home plate. The mound radius remained at 8 feet from the 40-foot softball rubber location. It looks a little weird having the boys' pitching rubber way in the back with just 2 inches of dirt until the back of the infield grass starts growing, but the wear in front of the mound is kept to a minimum throughout the season.

After we completed the grading, we Aerovated the turf area and did the final hand dragging to prepare the area for seeding. By edging the grass lines, we created a groove in the soil that allowed the grass seed to stay in the desired place and fill in thickly to produce a sharp grass line. Fifty pounds of Calpril was applied to the infield area. We used a drop spreader to put down 50 pounds of the Val-



The Turfco tow-behind topdresser was used to add the infield dirt.

ley Select blend of perennial ryegrass from Lewis Seed, applying it in a circle around the mound. I like walking backwards with the spreader as the seed comes out faster. After the seed was raked in, we applied fertilizer and covered the seed with grass straw mulch to protect it and give a nice target of the new infield turf.

Since the weather was in the mid-80s during the rest of August, the seed germinated within a week and was mowed with a push reel mower two weeks after the initial planting. We put down a second application of fertilizer at that time. Cutting the new grass after two weeks provided greater density. After six weeks, the Little League was able to begin their fall program. ■

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