



The Beam Clay 1994-1995 High School/Municipal Baseball Diamond of the Year:

Dave Dravecky Field in Boardman, Ohio

By Bob Tracinski

Boardman, OH, High School's Dave Dravecky Field represents the same determination to overcome adversity that distinguished its namesake during his major-league career. The commitment and participation of a variety of local supporters have been vital in turning an unusable field into an attractive community-wide asset and the Beam Clay 1994-1995 Baseball Diamond of the Year in the School, Municipal and Park Division.

Sportscape International, Inc., of Boardman was retained to renovate the diamond. Company President Jim Puhalla served as project manager. Puhalla says, "The baseball field was originally constructed in 1970. Design and construction problems plagued the facility from the time it was completed. The original grass infield was lower than the outfield and the surrounding area by up to two feet, a problem which caused water to pool in the infield. The original soil contained 64-percent silt and clay with a percolation rate of 1/100 of an inch per hour. This combination resulted in frequent rainouts.

"Ten years after its construction, in an effort to correct design problems, the grass infield was replaced with a skinned surface. But by 1989 continuing drainage problems compelled Boardman High School to schedule as many away games as possible, all but abandoning the home diamond."

Athletic Director Al Burns adds, "Our teams are highly competitive in all sports. We have 59 different sports teams in grades seven through 12, and

club and intramural level teams as well.

"This community is 100 percent behind our entire sports program, and they're nuts about baseball."

The Boardman Dugout Club, a local booster organization, made a commitment to raise funds to refurbish the facility. Area businessmen Charlie Smithberger and Jim Pondillo, co-chairmen for project, put together a simple business plan. Smithberger says, "We worked with Puhalla to define our needs, then developed a four-year plan with each step scheduled and costed. Operating under

an agreement with the Boardman Board of Education, we raised funds for the reconstruction of the facility, including the repair of fences, enlargement of dugouts and relocation of water lines, as well as the field renovation. We received 100-percent cooperation from the school, from Al Burns — who coordinated our efforts with the school — from the high school's maintenance director, Dick Cornell, from the coaches, students, parents and the community at large.

"The major part of the fund-raising

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The baseball diamond at Boardman High School, now known as Dave Dravecky Field, has been reconstructed to eliminate structural defects like the depressed infield of the original facility. Photo courtesy: Jim Puhalla.

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effort was the sale of advertising for the outfield fence. These were sold at \$1,000 each on a four-year program, with the first year's contribution being \$400, the second year's \$300, then \$200 and \$100. This corresponded with our need for funds, as the major renovation efforts were the most costly, but ongoing work also would need to be financed."

Smithberger credits Frank Dravecky, father of Dave Dravecky, as a tremendous asset to the project. "This man has been a driving force for baseball throughout his life, working with our kids at all levels," relates Smithberger. "Now that he is retired, this field is his labor of love, and he performs much of the ongoing regular maintenance. He's been an inspiration to the entire community."

Smithberger also has high praise for Puhalla. "We couldn't have accomplished this without his guidance, professionalism, attention to detail and downright passion for this project," says Smithberger. "He's one of those rare people who, if you give him his own horn and ask him to toot it, he wouldn't do it loudly enough."

Puhalla and Joe Maruskin started a landscape business in 1977. Shortly afterward, the young company worked on its first sports field and immediately realized the need for specialists in this area. As its reputation spread, primarily by word of mouth, the company began to work on more sports facilities.

In 1985, as Puhalla was working on the infield renovation of Youngstown State University's baseball diamond, he connected with Marshall Bossard, a sports turf guru who passed along more than advice. Bossard's stickler attitude and understanding of the role the sports field plays in the game reinforced Puhalla's commitment to the sports field specialty.

Puhalla says, "Much of my knowledge of this profession has come through experience and experimentation. Bossard and others within the industry have generously shared their expertise, and I've joined in their commitment to always learning, always looking for a better way."

Planning and Designing

Puhalla says the baseball diamond at Boardman High School presented fairly

typical problems in redesign and renovation. "In this part of the country, the single most common problem is standing water on the infield due to inadequate surface drainage," says Puhalla. "Poorly planned contours stop water from running off the field, and since internal drainage won't work in the skinned areas, positive surface drainage has to be established if the field is to be safe and playable.

"When we approach a project of this kind, we try to meet four goals, ranked in order of importance. The first is to make the facility safer and more usable. The second goal is to make the field easy to maintain, which normally follows after the first goal has been met. The third goal is to provide a facility that assists the performance of the athlete by offering the best possible conditions on which to perform. Finally, we aim to make the fields aesthetically pleasing. Of course, all these goals must be met within the limitations imposed by the project's budget.

"A survey of the existing topography is essential to field construction and reconstruction. When we refurbish a baseball diamond, we first do a topographical survey of the infield, outfield and surrounding areas to determine how water moves through and around the property. Then we come up with a solution to permanently fix the problem. Each set of conditions, and thus each field, is different.

Reconstruction

"Renovation of Dave Dravecky Field began with the application of a layer of subsoil over the entire infield. The infield was raised two feet to allow for positive surface drainage and to prevent outfield and sideline drainage onto the infield surface. Bossard's infield shaping strategy that moves the water off the infield with no internal drainage is the basis of my designs.

"After the placement of subsoil, six inches of topsoil were spread on the infield. We rebuilt the pitcher's mound with a sand and clay mix. To increase permeability of the skinned areas, calcined clay was incorporated into the 60-percent sand/40-percent silt clay used in those areas.

"The infield was sodded with a 50-percent bluegrass/50-percent-perenni-

al ryegrass sod, and the outfield was slit-seeded with a similar mixture. The project required 2,500 cubic yards of on-site subsoil, 750 yards of topsoil, 225 tons of sand-clay mix and 2,500 square yards of sod. The renovation project was completed in 1993."

The athletic department purchased new mowers and a scoreboard and installed internal drainage in the form of a graveled French drain at the perimeter of the field.

Dave Dravecky Field is busy from April through early September as the prime site for the Boardman High School varsity and junior varsity baseball games and practices plus the Boardman Community Baseball Colt League's summer play. It hosts a total of 65 games and 45 practices each year.

"This field is able to support competition in a wide variety of weather conditions," says Puhalla. "In its first season of use the diamond performed so well that the Boardman High School team was able to play several home games on days when weather conditions had forced postponement or cancellation of games at other local fields," he adds.

Skinned Area Maintenance

Skinned areas of the field receive daily attention during the season, notes Puhalla. "After the area is moistened to allow for surface penetration, a nail drag is used to keep the sand-clay soil loose. Next, a mat drag is used to break up the soil clumps and to level the surface. Dragging begins six to 12 inches from grass edges and works toward the middle of the skinned areas to prevent loss of sand-clay soil into the grass. Holes at the pitcher's mound, batter's box and bases are filled, tamped and hand-raked each day. The field is chalk-lined for each game and is frequently moistened before games to control dust.

"Edging is performed twice a year: at the end of May, following the high school season and before the start of summer leagues, and at the beginning of October to prepare the diamond for the coming year. Before edging, a high-pressure water hose is used to remove any of the skinned-area sand-clay mix that has accumulated at the grass edge.

"Resodding of worn areas around the pitcher's mound, home plate and the bases is also completed in October.



(Left to right) Project Manager Jim Puhalla of Sportscape International; Frank Dravecky, community volunteer and father of Dave Dravecky; and Charlie Smithberger of the Boardman Dugout Club were key members of the coalition of public and private individuals who helped to revitalize the diamond.

Because local weather prevents completion of such work immediately before the high school season, which begins in March, the October work allows the diamond to be ready for the start of the season. When spring weather permits, a tractor with a pulverizer attachment is used on the skinned area to break up the layer of compaction that forms over the winter."

Turfgrass Maintenance

Puhalla's soil and turf maintenance program is equally meticulous. "A soil test is performed early each spring to gauge the pH and nutrient value of the soil accurately. The test results then provide the basis for the year's fertilization program. No lime or sulfur is applied if the pH is between six and seven. Lesco's fertilizer is applied at the rate of four pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year, along with a carefully controlled amount of phosphorus and potassium.

"According to researchers at Ohio State University, available phosphorus should be between 80 and 120 pounds per acre and available potassium between 300 and 500 pounds per acre. Specially blended fertilizers are used throughout the year to correct any deficiencies in P and K.

"The infield is mowed almost daily at 1 1/2 inches with a McLane reel mower. The outfield is mowed every two to three days at two inches with a John Deere

rotary ride-on mower with an empty garden roller attached to the back. The mowing direction is alternated at every mowing. The mower and roller combination creates an attractive checkerboard pattern with virtually no additional effort for the school staff and volunteers." The turf is aerated twice a year, in mid-May, when the high school season ends, and at the conclusion of summer league play, usually in mid-September.

"Weeds are controlled throughout the year with DowElanco's Confront or PBI Gordon's Trimec Plus, depending on the particular weed species observed. Monsanto's Dimension is used as a pre-emergent for annual bluegrass

at the end of March and the end of August.

"Lesco's Touché and TwoSome are used alternately to control leaf spot, red thread and dollar spot when these diseases threaten. Touché is also used in the late fall to prevent snow mold. No insecticides have been used since no infestations have occurred.

"Irrigation is performed as needed to prevent the combination bluegrass and perennial ryegrass field from going into summer dormancy. Currently, manual irrigation is used — a two-inch fire hose for the skinned area, 3/4-inch hoses and lawn sprinklers for the infield and a traveling sprinkler for the outfield. The field's annual operating budget is \$15,000 and includes field maintenance procedures and any necessary minor renovation, fence work, dugout work and turf care.

"Frank Dravecky volunteers the daily maintenance of the diamond during the season. Two members of the school district maintenance staff line the field and maintain the spectator areas. Coaches and players hand-rake skinned areas when heavy rains make tractor use unwise. Six to eight volunteers of the Boardman Dugout Club regularly show up for seasonal field maintenance and special projects. Night lighting, an automatic irrigation system, new bleachers and a warning track are on the wish list for future installation."

Sportscape International applies fertilizer, iron, herbicides and fungicides,

and aerates the turf. The firm also consults with school officials on maintenance of the turf and skinned area.

Puhalla says, "When we design and construct a facility, even if the client handles the maintenance themselves, we try to stay involved in directing and guiding maintenance. We want the field to remain in top condition for the community, the athletes and our own professional reputation. It probably costs us a little in the short term, but the long-term health of the field is worth it."

Burns adds, "This field is a tribute to what can happen when a group of parents come to you and don't just say we want to help the school, but we have a plan on what we want to do and how we can do it. We want to work with you to make sure it comes out right, for the good of the community, but especially for our kids."

Puhalla's acceptance speech at the national STMA meeting closed with these inspiring words, "It seems to me that the community effort that produced Dave Dravecky Field can be a model for making people believe that even in this time of tight money for public projects we can work together to give our kids the kind of facilities that will allow them to find the seeds of greatness in themselves." □

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The Beam Clay Baseball Diamond of the Year Award is sponsored jointly by Beam Clay, the Sports Turf Managers Association and sportsTURF magazine in recognition of excellence and professionalism in maintaining safe, professional-quality diamonds. Winning diamonds are named in the professional, college, and high school | municipal | park categories.

Judges for the 1994-1995 Beam Clay Baseball Diamond of the Year Awards are Bob Wilkinson, stadium superintendent, New York Yankees, Yankee Stadium; Brandon Koehnke, manager of field maintenance, Cleveland Indians; Pete Flynn, head groundskeeper, New York Mets, Shea Stadium; and Steve Wightman, stadium field manager, San Diego Padres, Jack Murphy Stadium.