



BEARS

BARTRAM TRAIL HIGH SCHOOL / TURF PROGRAM

WHERE STUDENTS LEARN

A LITTLE 'BOUT **LIFE** AND

A LOTTA 'BOUT **TURF**

Many school districts face the same problem, over use of fields and not enough money to maintain the fields. It seems each district takes a different approach to athletic field maintenance. From 2000 until 2002, I worked for Duval County Schools where I was responsible for fertilizing and spraying 16 high schools and 23 middle schools. The irrigation repair and mowing were in different departments. In recent years, all field maintenance practices are in one department under the direction of Kevin Morgan. They have also increased maintenance practices. In St. Johns County, the athletic directors or coaches are responsible for maintaining the fields at most schools. At Bartram Trail High School we take a different approach to providing safe athletic facilities. We offer a program where students learn turf management.

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-
- **We offer a program**
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I started teaching here in the Fall of 2002. We offer three levels of Turf Science where students learn how to mow, fertilize, irrigate, and paint athletics fields. We also assist with the maintenance of the common grounds. We are a public high school of approximately 2,500 students near St. Augustine. There are about 50 students signed up for Turf in the 2017-2018 school year. We have varsity and junior varsity teams in the following sports where students prepare the fields: football, soccer (boys and girls), lacrosse (boys and girls), track, and softball. The baseball coach likes for he and the players to maintain their field but we do assist when needed. In the mornings, I am the parking lot supervisor but have student interns who work on the fields during that time. They are the most advanced students. We have former students who have gone on to college to earn a degree in Turf Management or Agriculture. Some are now at golf courses or larger lawn maintenance companies. A few have started their own business. A couple are now sales representatives for chemical and



By **Ronald Griffin**
Turf Instructor

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fertilizer vendors. Mark Clay and Nick Fedewa with SMG are great contributors to the program. They allow a group of students and me to work during a Jacksonville Jaguar game each year. Some former students are now working for SMG at Ever Bank Field in Jacksonville.



George Toma and Ron Griffin

In 2005, we were a practice site for Super Bowl XXXIX. The New England Patriots practiced at our school during the week before the game. In the summer of 2004, our football stadium field was renovated and a new 70-yard field was built near the stadium. I was very fortunate to work with Mr. George Toma during that time. It was a valuable experience that I will never forget. We remain friends and he sends me a cap from each Super Bowl since.

The first step in renovation was removal of the old surface. It was built with local soil containing a lot of roots and hardpan. The contractor dug out about two feet of material and replaced it with a 90% sand

and 10% peat moss mix. Also drain lines were installed around the track and another around the sideline and back of the end zones. A new irrigation system was also installed. The renovation was delayed several times because several hurricanes came near or through our area in 2004. Finally it was sodded with thick cut Tifton 419 Bermuda grass sod just in time for our first home football game. It was over seeded before our soccer season and the again before the Patriots started practicing. We have only sodded lacrosse goal areas and the center of the field since. We also hosted a Monday night Jaguar practice several years ago.

A typical day in Turf class changes from each season and sport. We have more equipment compared to most schools. Most of our budget comes from our athletic department and booster club. We



Ron and his league of extraordinary turfsters

also borrow equipment from other schools, local golf courses, and the parks and recreation department. We have two Toro Triplex mowers for the game fields. Also a 5 gang reel mower with a 4300 John Deere tractor for the practice fields and the baseball outfield. The students use two ZTR mowers for the common grounds. We also have two John Deere Gators for transporting equipment and trash. There are several string trimmers, edgers, and back pack blowers. We also have a Kubota tractor with a front end loader. Safe use of the equipment is an important part of their education. A contractor provides herbicide and insecticide treatment on all of the athletic fields. The students and I still fertilize the fields. Most of the time we use 24-02-11 or 18-0-35.

During football season, we paint the practice field lines every Monday after the fields have been mowed. The practice fields are mowed at 1.25 inches. The stadium field is mowed at .75 inch every day during the season except game day. The practice fields are painted using Pioneer Aerosol Maxx and the stadium is painted with Pioneer Britestripe Airless. On Wednesdays, we paint the numbers for home varsity games. On Thursdays, we paint the lines and any

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white parts of the logo. On Fridays, we paint the blue and gray bear logo. Also students put bags in the garbage cans, put out the sideline tarps, set up the benches, pylons and padded numbers. There are usually five or six students there on Friday nights to help pick up the garbage and help where needed during and after the game. Our football coach has the players take the sideline tarps off of the field for us. We then spread them out to dry on the track. The tarps help protect the bench area on our sidelines. For junior varsity games we paint lines but not number or logos. We over seed in late October with an annual/perennial ryegrass blend at a rate of about 350 pounds per acre.

The baseball infield is also over seeded. This year, we are going to over seed all of baseball as well as softball. For soccer season we still mow every day. Typically we paint the lines on the practice fields once per week and the stadium on game days. Sometime football and soccer season overlap and we use blue paint early in the soccer season. Most soccer games are played away early in the season. We have plastic markers in the ground for football and soccer corner and midfield markers. They also serve to put flag poles in during soccer matches. Soccer season is typically late Fall through Winter. We have boys and girls junior varsity as well as varsity games at the football stadium. We usually paint the lines on the day of a home match. In the Spring, we start lacrosse season. One of the girl's lacrosse



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coaches help us paint their field at the beginning of the season. One of the challenges with lacrosse is that boys and girls have different lines. We do use a common sideline. Blue paint is used for the boy's lines and white is used for the girl's lines and other common lines. Visiting soccer and lacrosse teams compliment the condition of our field because of the over seeding and gentle slope of the crown.

In late Winter and early Spring, we start baseball and softball seasons. On a typical day we start by watering the clay and conditioner on the softball field around 1:00. We then use a nail type drag to loosen the material. The next class will then drag the skinned area with a mat drag after it has dried some. We then paint the lines during the last class. We will also water the clay again on a hot day. Students also mow the grass, blow out the dugouts, paint the bases, and empty the trash cans throughout the week and especially on game day. If we have a JV and varsity double header, several students will come in around 6:00 and help repair the field between games. We will mat drag and repaint the lines before the second games. Sometime we will water the field again. There are some days where students have to pump water off of the field because of heavy rain.

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In April, we also host Relay for Life at the football stadium. Spring football starts around the beginning of May. We usually spray out the ryegrass after the last lacrosse match. During the Summer months, a former student and I maintain the fields.

I can't imagine maintaining our fields without the hard work of the students. Some students go above and beyond what is expected.

On a recent Saturday, I needed extra help because of all the rain. I sent a text to two recent graduates who said they would help if needed. I had four former and one current student show up to help mow and break up grass clippings. There are days when they test my patience but most of the time they are hard-working teenagers. ●

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