

Mound Talk

Proper reconstruction, repair and maintenance of your pitcher's mound is absolutely essential

By Robert Meyer | EDITOR IN CHIEF

POP QUIZ TIME: Which parts of a baseball or softball field receives the most amount of wear and tear?

The (quite easy) answer is two-fold: the pitcher's mound and the batter's box. No other parts of the field are stepped on more, trampled on more, dug up, in or out more and essentially beat to a pulp more. This is why frequent reconstruction of these areas is necessary and proper maintenance is absolutely crucial — there's no way around it.

Focusing solely on the pitcher's mound in this article, in an effort to provide a "Pitcher's Mound Build/Reconstruction 101" of sorts, we spoke with industry expert Jeff Langner, brand manager for Profile Products, the manufacturer of Turface Athletics field maintenance products. One item that Langner stresses to any field manager before beginning any new build or reconstruction of a mound: "First off, we encourage people to really look at their

usage, the resources they have available, and (ensure) that they're choosing a product that's compatible with their maintenance program. Consider how much of the game is played on the mound — every pitch starts there. Invest in it. Making sure you have a playable pitcher's mound is critical."

Maintenance basics

Turface Athletics (Turface.com) recommends the following equipment for regular pitcher's mound maintenance and repair/reconstruction:

- Mound clay/blocks
- Pick
- Tamp
- Broom
- Water can (filled)
- Landscape rake
- Tarp

Because of the abuse a pitcher's mound takes, it must be repaired frequently. This

simple process, compiled by Turface Athletics, should only take a few minutes at the end of a day, series or homestand, depending on your field usage:

1. Begin by sweeping dry, loose materials off worn areas to expose the mound clay and remove from the mound (don't sweep into the grass). If topdressing remains on old clay, new clay will not bind and will tear out.
2. Loosen the worn areas with a sharpened iron rake (sharpen the teeth on a grinder) in preparation to add new specialty packing clay.
3. Now water the loosened areas lightly and add Turface Mound Clay or shredded softened MoundMaster blocks.
4. Tamp new materials until firm.
5. Once firm, lightly moisten these areas again.
6. Shave the high spots down with a sharpened iron rake. Use your rake to



Proper pitcher's mound construction and renovation is critical to a safe, playable field.

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pull dry material over wet material.

7. Lightly rake, moisten and cover with your tarp.

Advice from Langner: "Too often, people start mound work and they don't take the proper amount of time to do some of the necessary checking and double-checking of measurements and things of that nature. Anytime you're doing mound work, you have the opportunity to square up the rubber, check the distance from plate to rubber and even the chance to re-check the baselines and make sure everything is to scale. Measurements could be off a degree or two, and that can make a significant difference in the way the field plays."

Clay products

Turface Athletics has clay solutions for any pitcher's mound build or reconstruction, regardless of level of play (professional, collegiate, high school or municipal/recreation).

Turface MoundMaster blocks are hydraulically packed blocks of Turface's bagged clay that create the desired foundation on a pitcher's mound.

Advice from Langner: "These 2.5-inch thick, high-density blocks, which come in packages of eight, are sealed to keep them from drying out. They allow people, especially doing renovation, to save steps in the construction process. The rest of a mound can be constructed with regular infield mix, but we want to make sure that those last 2.5 inches are made with high-density and high-durability clay. This provides the athlete with the foundation to have good footing, a firm surface and also prevention from digging holes you see commonly on mounds on rec fields. In

mound renovations, we encourage people to excavate out those 2.5 inches (3 inches at the most), fill in with blocks first and then come back and finish with a layer of our bagged clay."

Turface makes two types of mound clay: Professional and All-Purpose. Professional is made from the same virgin clay used in MoundMaster blocks and comes in red and also gumbo gray, which possesses a high level of tackiness. All-Purpose clay is a sand/clay mixture that is an alternative to the professional clay, designed for mounds that don't get regular tarping and/or irrigation. It also provides a more forgiving surface, in terms of play.

Advice from Langner: "Make sure you're selecting the right product. We've tried to expand and improve mound clay over the past several years to give customers options. At recreational and municipal facilities where multiple fields are being managed and they don't have the staff or the ability to tarp or water the mound, sometimes the Professional clay might not be the right choice or may be more difficult to manage. Whereas our All-Purpose clay, with a little bit higher of a sand content, is more forgiving, especially in hot, dry climates where a Professional clay can dry out and crack."

Langner also advises that at your facility, if you're installing Turface Professional mound clay or the blocks, let the wear of your field dictate your process.

"If you have a facility where primarily kids 12 and under are playing on it, their strides are going to be a lot shorter and there's going to be a lot less wear on [the mound]," he says. "In this case, you may not need to install the blocks on that entire slope."

Industry trends

In Langner's position, he frequently talks to field managers and thus, he has a keen sense of trends within the industry.

"As an industry, we've done a better job of educating coaches and field managers on the value of these mound clays," Langner says. "Facilities that maybe have relied on just infield mix (for their pitcher's mounds) in the past are now being better about investing in this material. It's a long-term investment — the facilities that spend the time and money to put in a professional-level clay, or the clay blocks, are going to get long-lasting durability, if they're maintained correctly."

"But these are not maintenance-free products. Using a bagged clay and coming in after every game, tournament or home-stand and repairing the holes and wear areas, even though they're smaller wear areas than you normally see, are long-term investments."

Langner also says he is seeing more field managers at the high school and college level emulating professional mound conditions.

"Bringing clay all the way up is the best way [to do this]," he says. "A lot of facilities are building their clay right up to [field] grade and then topping with a calcined clay to protect it. I'm seeing a better adaptation of this practice at colleges and high schools, where they are emulating pro-level conditions. Five to 10 years ago, you saw a lot of poor mound management at the high school level. The standard is being raised." **SFM**



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