



Student's senior project is a "DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH"

▲ The Freedom High School baseball team with a bat Steve Peeler, CSFM, won at an STMA SAFE Foundation auction.

In September 2013, Landon Kincaid had a dream when he set out to complete the senior high school project that is required for graduation in North Carolina; he wanted it to be unique. Landon found his first love in life, baseball, at a very young age. His dedication to the game is superior to a normal high school player and his work ethic is unstoppable. He is also a team player and he wanted to do something that would not only help keep his love of the game alive, but would also help his teammates and others for years to come at Freedom High School, Morganton, NC.

Rebuilding a baseball infield is not an easy task. It takes funding, time, and expertise to get it done the right way. But even facing these challenging obstacles, Landon was determined to make it happen. A plan was developed to raise funds and to bring his project to a reality, and through community support, professional mentoring, and a lot of determination, he reached his goal.

At the beginning of the project, the field was overgrown with no defined shape. The windscreen to cover the

chain link fencing was in shreds, dugouts had been in disarray since a massive flood in 2010 when the entire field had been under 6 feet of water for days. Once the water had subsided, the field was totally covered with fine silt from the river which runs directly behind the outfield. To top that off, all of the equipment had been stolen 2 years after the flood and the team had very limited funding to



◀ Landon Kincaid

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replace it. Fencing and all other structures had damage 3 years after the flood.

Landon approached his coach, Clint Zimmerman, and I to gauge our interest in his project; Clint and I are both former players of the program. We both agreed immediately to assist him in his quest as professional mentors and a plan was designed to address the key factors on the field.

First on the agenda were the most important areas on the field: the pitching mound and the infield. Lips had formed over the years of play and the turf had grown in as much as 4 feet in some areas. The back arc had areas that were over 4 feet. Therefore the field would have to be laid out and reshaped to regulation. The pitching mound was more of a peak and had neither table nor landing area, or consistency of shape. There was no good quality clay for push off or landing to maintain the structure or help the pitchers perform better. Landon, being a pitcher, considered the mound his "office" so he took on the challenge to improve its performance. New mound clay was added to build a mound table and landing area. The slope was corrected to regulations of 1 inch per 1 foot. Landon was pleased with the progress and looked forward to using the mound for the 2014 home opener.

The infield skin and base paths were next. Over the past 30 years, a local infield mix had been added every year. The result of all the additional infield mix was an elevated surface more than 1 foot above foul territory and outfield. Grass edges were holding water on the infield at the back arc and had to be removed before any grading could take place. The Freedom HS baseball facility had never

been graded with consistency before this project. Laser grading was the best approach to remedy the high and low spots in the infield and also drain any surface water away from the infield skin (70% sand and 30% silt, clay, and fines).

Drainage was not a major problem through the profile, but it had no stability once in play and left large divots after heavy use. Laser grading and balancing the current mix was the first step in getting the maximum benefit for the playing surface and player performance. Once the surface had been graded with the proper slope, a Stabilizer Solutions product was added to the surface and incorpo-

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Landon would like to thank all of the sponsors that donated materials and funding to make his Sr. project a reality:

- Carolina Green Corp.
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- Virgil Elkins
- Tom Ford
- Andrew Tallent

rated into the infield profile at a 1 inch depth. Results were instant. The surface held together and there was far less divots than before. A snow storm dumped 5 inches which was followed by an inch of rain on the morning of the first outdoor practice. The field was playable by that afternoon and allowed the team to practice while other surrounding fields were saturated and unsafe. Ball bounce was more consistent.

The dugouts damaged in the flood had many leaks through the back walls from ground water as algae had started to take over the dugout floors. Water lines had been leaking for some time and contributed to the additional damage to the footings of the dugouts. Graffiti had been painted on the wall and floors by vandals and were to be pressure washed and painted with team colors. Once the dugouts and backstop walls were a bright red color, a new wind-screen was installed on the outfield fence to connect each new renovated section of the ballpark. The field really caught everyone's eye when up close or at a far distance as did the new warning track material that was placed from dugout to dugout and in front of the backstop wall. To finish off Landon's project, Opening Day logos were painted in front of each dugout on the grass.

February 27 was opening day for the Freedom Patriots baseball program. Work that began in October 2013 was complete and it

was time for Landon's project to take center stage. What a proud moment it was! As the team prepared for the game, it seemed to have a spark of energy and motivation to perform to the best of their ability. A big league atmosphere had come to the small town of Morganton, NC.

Landon got the ball that night to pitch on his newly renovated mound and he performed well, pitching five solid innings and getting the win. What Landon had accomplished was not only for himself and his team; it was for the entire community and for many players to come in the future. A master plan has been developed by Landon for additional improvements to be made after he graduates and begins his college career at St. Andrews University, where he has received an academic/baseball scholarship. ■

Steve E. Peeler, CSFM, is a project manager for Carolina Green Corp. The author would like to acknowledge his former MLB colleagues who sent infield samples to put on this infield for Opening Day: Trevor Vance, Kansas City Royals; Bill Findley, St. Louis Cardinals; Dan Bergstrom, Houston Astros; Andy Bartley, Pittsburgh Pirates; Luke Yoder, San Diego Padres; Larry DiVito, Minnesota Twins; Roger Baird and Justin Spillman, Chicago Cubs; and Grant Trenbeath, Arizona Diamondbacks.

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