

Nelson named turf manager at Prospect Meadows

Written by Jim Ecker
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Blake Nelson has been hearing the joke on a regular basis now that he's the new turf manager at Prospect Meadows.

Why does a sports complex that has artificial turf on all the fields need a turf manager? Even Nelson has to chuckle about that one.

"I can't even tell you the amount of times I've heard it," he said. "Why do they need a turf manager? It's maintenance free, right?"

First of all, only the infields on the eight fields at Prospect Meadows will have field turf. All of the outfields will have grass, which needs a lot of tender care.

Secondly, artificial turfs do require a certain amount of maintenance to keep them in pristine condition. Those infields are expensive and they need to last a good long time.

Nelson, 26, began his duties at Prospect Meadows on April 8. The new facility, located north of Marion, will be opening in late May and there's still plenty of work to do.

The Opening Day ceremonies are scheduled for Thursday, May 23 and the first tournament will be held that weekend.

Nelson has joined a staff that's led by General Manager Jack Roeder and Assistant G.M. Steve James. Roeder ran the Cedar Rapids Kernels before leading the effort the last 10 years to raise money and build Prospect Meadows, while James worked at Perfect Game USA before climbing aboard last year.

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"It's an exciting time to pair with Jack and Steve and the community," said Nelson.

Nelson grew up in Tama and graduated from South Tama High School. He's been interested in turf management since his teen-age years and has compiled quite a resume in a short period of time.

"I actually started in high school at the Tama Toledo Country Club," he reported.

He's also worked in turf management at Iowa State University, the Texas Rangers in Major League Baseball, and the University of Nebraska.

Four of the regulation baseball fields at Prospect Meadows will be opening for a weekend tournament in late May. The Miracle Field for people with disabilities also will be ready on Opening Day. Four more regulation fields are scheduled to open in June.

There's plenty of work to go around, even for a guy who's the new turf manager at a complex that features artificial turf on all the infields. "It's going to be a learning curve for everybody," said Nelson.

"We're trying to grow more grass."

That's his specialty. And it's no joke.