

Kernels GM: No reason to panic

Written by Jim Ecker

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There's a 20-foot wall of snow in the middle of their parking lot at Veterans Memorial Stadium from all the plowing this winter, but you can drive around that big, white barrier and find somewhere else to park at the ballpark.

It's the thick layer of snow that's currently sitting on the field that could become problematic as the April 3 season opener approaches, but Kernels General Manager Doug Nelson said it's too early to push the panic button.

Once the field temperature hits 55 degrees, the new sod that was installed last fall will turn green in a hurry, he predicted. A nice warm rain would help.

"Once the field temperature hits 55, it will wake the grass up and it will start to grow," Nelson said Friday. "The good news is, our field will warm up much quicker and much sooner than an ordinary lawn because it's a sand-based field."

Nelson said there's no reason to sweep or shovel the snow off the field at this point, because the grass won't begin to grow until the field temperature hits 55 anyway.

"We really need to let Mother Nature take its course," he said. "Even if we did get all the snow off the ground, the roots are still dormant because the ground hasn't hit the 55-degree temperature. So until the ground temperature warms up, that grass isn't going to grow."

Nelson said he's seen a brown field at Veterans Memorial Stadium turn green in a hurry in past years.

"It's amazing," he said. "The sun will come out, it will warm that field up to the 55-degree mark, put a little fertilizer on it, get the sprinklers going and it will be fine."

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Nelson said the sprinklers - and warm rain - would help get the frost out of the ground and make the field playable.

The Kernels plan to install new pads on the outfield walls, but that work cannot begin until the snow is out of the way. Otherwise, Nelson said there's typically not a lot of work that needs to be done on the field until about 10 days from opening day.

The Kernels replaced all the grass at Perfect Game Field last fall with new sod. Even with the harsh winter, Nelson is confident the new grass will be fine.

"A warmer March certainly would have helped," he said. "However, we got the grass put in soon enough where it was really down pretty well before the growing season ended last fall. So the grass could use warm weather, but it's in pretty good shape."

Nelson said there's no reason at this point to make contingency plans to play home games at another ballpark.

"Quite frankly, if we need to come up with a Plan B, I'm not sure what it would be," he said. "Because everyone in the midwest is battling with the same weather conditions, so no one else's field is going to be much different than ours."

Nelson said Target Field in Minneapolis, the home of the parent Minnesota Twins, has an extensive network of water pipes under the field that keeps the temperature at a minimum of 55 degrees all year.

Nelson said there's rain in the forecast for Cedar Rapids early this coming week. "That would do wonders for the field," he said.

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The Kernels are scheduled to host Clinton in the season opener on Thursday, April 3 at 6:35 p.m. in the start of a four-game series.