

Issue Date: D Magazine MAY 2008, Posted On: 4/23/2008

The Dirt Merchant

by Spencer Michlin

Carl Watson hates strawberries.

"Strawberries are those colorful bruises baseball players get when they slide on rocky dirt. Mamas don't want their kids coming home with 'em, and I hate 'em just as much," Watson says. The 51-year-old printing and promotions executive is now in his second year of selling dirt under the banner of Big League Dirt Company, which he co-owns with his wife, Kim.

For Watson, ridding the diamond of rock dirt is not just about preventing injuries. "Winning baseball starts with great dirt," Watson says. "A good groundskeeper can add 10 wins to your schedule. Ballparks need a combination of clay, sand, and sediment in the proper proportions. What those proportions are and whether to use brown or red dirt are up to the coach or manager. Baseball people are both opinionated and superstitious. It's a little like dealing with chefs."

According to Watson, most choose a mound built from a mixture of about 90 percent clay to 10 percent sediment, usually brown in color. Since pitchers tend to dig around with their cleats, the mound needs the sediment to provide the necessary body to make repairs between games. Watson adds that infields are usually mixtures of 60 to 70 percent clay and sediment with 30 to 40 percent sand.



KING OF THE HILL: Carl Watson and some of his product.
photography by Jeremy Sharp