

MISSOURI SITE PROPOSED FOR SPORTS TURF RESEARCH CENTER

Industry and government are currently working together in Missouri to establish a center for sports turf research and education near Kansas City. The project, launched two years ago by David Doherty, a Kansas City-based builder of recreational centers, has recently gained momentum with the donation of 240 acres in Lone Jack, MO, by the Powell Foundation and a cooperative agreement with the University of Missouri College of Agriculture in Columbia.

"I believe that we have the start of a National Sports Turf Research Center like those in England and the Netherlands," says the confident Doherty. "The difference in the U.S. is private enterprise has to take the first step before state and federal grant programs can chip in. If all goes as planned, private investment and government grants should generate nearly \$10 million for the development of a sports turf research center within the next two to three years."

Doherty's curiosity about the poor condition of football, soccer and baseball fields led him to contact George Toma, head groundskeeper for the Kansas City Chiefs, and Dr. James Watson, vice president of The Toro Company. They told him possible solutions to poor fields existed, but there wasn't a central research facility to test them.

Watson advised Doherty to contact Dr. David Minner at the University of Missouri to see how the university could help. "The

College of Agriculture had vegetables growing in all different kinds of crazy soils. One soil was made up of sand, clay and ground-up rubber. Couldn't you grow turf in the same type of soil on athletic fields?" he asked. Minner's answer was sure, but no one has ever tried it on an actual football or soccer field.

About this time, Doherty met Marjorie Powell Allen, heiress to the Yellow Transfer Freight fortune, and a director of the \$600-million Powell Foundation. Mrs. Allen was once a physical education teacher and loves kids. When she heard Doherty's concern over the condition of athletic fields, Mrs. Allen said she had been looking for new uses for the Powell Gardens in Lone Jack, a research arboretum run cooperatively between the Powell Foundation and the University of Missouri. Immediately, she took an extreme interest in the idea of an athletic facility for children which doubled as a research center for turf.

"I'll never forget meeting with Mrs. Allen and Dave in my office at Arrowhead Stadium," says Toma. "She really cares about kids and is real easy to talk to." During that meeting it was settled that 240 acres next to Powell Gardens would be set aside just for research into athletic fields.

DuraTurf, a private corporation, will build offices, a soils laboratory and dormitories on the grounds. The University of Missouri

hopes to offer a sports turf curriculum at the facility in addition to short courses. "The problem is turf graduates know a lot about growing turf, but hardly anything about setting goal posts, painting or preparing an infield," says Toma. "Most stadium groundskeepers know how to do all the field work, but they usually don't know enough about turf. A school is needed to teach turf graduates about field techniques and stadium groundskeepers about turf. There are jobs out there for guys who know how to do both."

Plans have been drawn for the research center, dormitories and the first football, soccer and baseball fields. Doherty hopes construction will be completed within the next two years. "We have to apply for matching fund grants from Missouri and the Federal government," he explains, "but we're very optimistic."

NFL APPROVES SWEDEN FOR 2ND EXHIBITION

The Minnesota Vikings and the Chicago Bears will be the first National Football League teams to play an exhibition game before sports fans in Gothenburg, Sweden, in August 1988. Gothenburg is only the second city outside the U.S. approved by the NFL to host a pre-season game. The League approved Wembley Stadium in London, England, for games in 1984, 1986 and this year.

The Vikings played the St. Louis Cardinals in the first international exhibition of American Football in 1984 at Wembley. Sam Monson, facilities supervisor for the Vikings in Eden Prairie, MN, was the U.S. advisor on field preparation for that first contest. He will also be the advisor to the stadium in Gothenburg. Monson is making an inspection tour of the stadium and practice facilities this month.

The NFL has received proposals from a number of other countries, says William Granholm, assistant to the president of the National Football Conference. "We could have sellouts in Germany, France and Italy tomorrow if we had the staff to do all the work," reports Granholm. The NFL also has invitations from Finland, Israel and Malaysia. "An international schedule of games is a possibility, but it is at least five to ten years away. Our first responsibility is to the continued success of professional football in the states."

Monson faces the prospect of helping both Gothenburg and Wembley prepare for exhibition games in 1988. "There's more involved than the game," says Monson. The teams practice in the cities a week before the event. That can mean preparing three sites in both locations before the teams arrive.

"We'll have to start from scratch in Sweden like we did at Wembley in 1984," Monson explains. "Volvo is sponsoring the event, so that should help a lot." See the story on Wembley in the July 1987 issue.



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