

## ATLANTA BRAVES PLAY OPENER ON NEW FIELD



Temperatures were in the 20s when the PAT field at Atlanta Stadium was completed. Celebrating the finished job are (left to right) Tim Bowyer, Steve Gibson, Ferrell Sellers, Turner Gibson, Bill Daniel and Sam Newpher.

Three weeks before the Atlanta Braves' April home opener, a new Prescription Athletic Turf (PAT) field was dedicated at Atlanta/Fulton County Stadium in Atlanta, GA, as one part of a state-financed \$18 million stadium renovation program. The field was installed in 12 weeks at a cost of more than \$700,000 by Southern Turf Nurseries of Norcross, GA.

The PAT field is similar to the fields at Mile High Stadium in Denver, CO, and the Orange Bowl in Miami, FL. A patented drainage system in the field can remove the equivalent of three inches of rainfall per hour. Fulton County Stadium has the largest PAT field yet installed and the only one being utilized for both professional baseball and professional football.

More than 900 truckloads of soil were removed from the stadium in January to create a 12-inch-deep depression. After lining the area with plastic, a network of drainage and irrigation lines was installed. The pipes were then covered with 5,000 yards of sand. A three-inch layer of calcined clay (Terra-Green) was placed on top of the sand and graded to provide a four-inch crown instead of the three-foot crown needed previously to drain the field. The subsurface drainage system is connected to two pumps underneath the stadium so that water can be pumped out of or into the field.

Six pairs of moisture-sensing probes were statistically located in the root zone before thin-cut sod of Tifway 419 and perennial ryegrass was laid over the 2.6 acres. On March 17, 35 new Toro sprinkler heads were installed, the field was rolled and toppedressed with sand. Since temperatures were only in the mid-20s, the decision was made to cover the entire field with a protective blanket to help the sod knit before the home opener three weeks later.

Sam Newpher, grounds manager for the Atlanta Braves, said the players liked the field immediately even though two or three small patches of sod were torn up during the opener on April 7. "Players in the dugouts noticed right away that they could see the whole field," said Newpher. "They didn't have to look over that three-foot crown anymore." "Everyone at the stadium is committed to making this the best field in profession-

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al sports," Newpher said. An annual motocross event will not be returning since it required covering the field with tons of dirt. The stadium is going to require greater protection of the field for concerts and religious events than in the past.

Newpher has consulted with managers of other PAT fields to learn about specific maintenance needs. "We will be fertilizing and irrigating more than before," said Newpher. "We plan to topdress more frequently with small amounts of sand instead of the heavy amounts we used to apply."

The renovation work being directed by T. Herman Graves, Atlanta Stadium Authority manager, also includes new scoreboards, more advertising signage, new seating, waterproofing the entire structure and improving the parking lots.

### **NATURAL TURF LOSES TORONTO DOME DECISION**

Despite the valiant efforts of the Toronto Blue Jay Fan Club and the local press to convince Stadium Corporation of Ontario to install natural turf in its new retractable-dome stadium, the decision has been made to use artificial turf. "It boiled down to cost and versatility," said Robert Hunter, vice president of operations for Stadium Corp.

The facility will be used for more than 100 days of non-sporting events according to Hunter. Covering or removing the natural turf for those events, in addition to artificially lighting the field when the dome is closed, proved too costly for natural turf to compete with artificial turf. "There is no guarantee that a natural field would work since many of the conditions are unique to the dome," explained Hunter. All the extras necessary to grow and protect a natural field made it cost five times more than artificial over a 14-year period.

"We have listened to the concerns of players and fans regarding artificial turf," said Hunter. The next step will be getting answers to these concerns from the manufacturers and installers of artificial surfaces. Hunter intends to build these solutions into the specifications before the job goes out for bid in July.

### **NEW PARTNER APPROVED FOR PHOENIX STADIUM PROJECT**

A \$150-million stadium in Phoenix, AZ, is back on track after a three-month delay caused by the withdrawal of one of the project developers last December. Metropolitan Structures West, Inc., a subsidiary of Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., has replaced the Kroh Brothers Development Co., of Kansas City, MO.

Metropolitan will act as co-managing partner with Martin Stone, owner of the Phoenix Firebirds. They will take the lead in completing negotiations with the city, and in continuing the development of the stadium mixed-use project. The Phoenix Stadium

Development Group, headed by Stone, will be responsible for negotiations to bring a National Football League franchise and a Major League Baseball franchise to Phoenix.

### **METRODOME REPLACES ARTIFICIAL SURFACE**

The six-year-old artificial turf surface at the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome in Bloomington, MN, has been replaced with an improved, softer surface from AstroTurf Industries, Inc. Steve Maki, head of physical operations at the facility, said the older

surface, installed when the indoor stadium opened in 1981, was too hard and bouncy. Both the Minnesota Vikings and Twins wanted the old surface replaced.

The Twins were the first to use the new AstroTurf-8 field in April for their season opener against the Oakland A's. Monsanto engineers changed the padding to provide a bounce and feel more like natural turf. Special non-directional blades were used for consistent ball bounce and greater surface resiliency. Portions of the field can be removed to accommodate special events, such as tractor pulls, concerts and the NCAA basketball playoffs.

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