

STMA Profile:

The Turfcon Team

By Bob Tracinski

In the future, a mere push of a button could transform the areas of major domed stadiums from natural sports fields to sturdy concrete for rock concerts, or smooth ice for hockey. The turf will be transported to a spacing-saving holding space, such as the top on an office complex, and its health preserved under greenhouse conditions if necessary, until another push of a button ushers its return.

That future may not be far away. The Greenway Group of Horsham, PA, has a patent pending for this concept, aptly named the "Stadium of the Future."

Roots of the Future

Tracking the path to this innovative concept leads back to the roots of development of today's turf industry.

As a boy walking barefoot on the differing grounds of his family's farm, Henry W. Indyk wondered why some soils felt soft and soothing, while others felt hard and grating; why on the same day some were hot and some were cold. His curiosity led him to a bachelor's degree in plant science, with a major in soils, at Rutgers College of Agriculture in 1950 and master's and Ph.D. degrees in agronomy with emphasis on soils from Pennsylvania State University.

Dr. Indyk then advanced into a five-year stint in agronomic research in the University of Delaware's Department of Agronomy. From there he returned to Rutgers University, spending one year as an extension specialist in pasture management. He later moved into the turfgrass field, succeeding Dr. Richard Skogley, the university's first extension specialist in turf. At that point, there was only one person in turf research at Rutgers.

Indyk's responsibilities for nearly 31 years as extension specialist reached to all areas of turfgrass management — home lawns, industrial, commercial, schools, public grounds, golf and sports. Throughout this time, he delved into the study and deeper understanding of soils, the growing medium of any crop—always intrigued by "what made them tick."

Initially, the top turf programs in the



Dr. Henry Indyk and Dr. Richard Caton (from left) display a model of the "Stadium of the Future" at the 1993 STMA Conference and Exhibition. Photo by Steve Trusty.

United States belonged to Rutgers University, the University of Rhode Island, Penn State University, and Cornell. Although these schools and their turfgrass specialists were pioneering a young field, there was little general interest in turfgrasses.

At that time, Dr. Indyk was just beginning to realize how important his soils background would become in the field. As his work progressed, it became apparent to him that one of the biggest limitations in turfgrass development and maintenance was a lack of understanding about soils.

With the wide-ranging scope of an extension specialist position, it's essential to maximize time to best meet the needs of all served. Dr. Indyk developed working relationships with members of the turfgrass industry and was instrumental in the organization and development of such groups as the New Jersey Sod Association, the New Jersey Turfgrass Association, the New Jersey Turfgrass Expo, the Irrigation Association, and the Cemetery Association. For 13 years, he served as executive director of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of New Jersey. His reach extended to the national level, including work with the American Sod Producers Association, the Landscape Industry Advisory Council, and the Musser Turfgrass Association.

Naturally, he didn't neglect his other responsibilities either, working with the demanding homeowner segment by lecturing, organizing and participating in meetings, formulating recommendations and developing literature to feed its growing needs.

Indyk also worked to bridge the gap between practical and research-oriented programs at Rutgers. First, he encouraged an outstanding student to concentrate on the turfgrass area. Then he persuaded the administration to create a new research position in which Dr. Reed Funk has

made a tremendous impact on the turfgrass industry.

Early on, Indyk perceived the area of athletic fields to have some of the greatest needs; but in the beginning, advances in sports turf were difficult. The few individuals attending the early meetings on athletic field development and maintenance had extremely limited funds and little power to generate the changes needed. Only in the last five to eight years has interest grown to high levels. Indyk attributes this to the growing popularity of sports at both the participant and spectator levels, as well as the increased concern about field safety. That safety concerns may be driven by litigation is a sign of the times, yet even today many fields are in need of major help.

Indyk sees the development of the Sports Turf Managers Association as an outgrowth of the response to the interest and demand for better, safer fields. He also notes the expansion of sports turf interest within the local levels of organizations. Nearly every state's turfgrass conference now offers sessions on athletic fields, which reflects the industry's response to their needs.

Beyond the University

Dr. Indyk retired from his Rutgers extension position on July 1, 1990, but he didn't slow down. As the turfgrass agronomist for Turfcon, the professional consultation branch of The Greenway Group, he continues his outreach in the turfgrass field.

Though Indyk's expertise has advanced many projects, there are a few that bring an added twinkle to his eye, like the work in process at the new Rutgers Stadium, the natural turf fields of the Philadelphia Eagles and New York Giants, and the turfgrass race track of Monmouth Park, NJ. He calls working

as a consultant on the Los Angeles Coliseum, in preparation for the 1984 Olympics, with the installation of the HyPlay system in cooperation with Richard Jenks from Oregon, "an interesting, successful experience, one in which I take pride."

The industry has lauded Dr. Indyk's contributions. Awards he's received include: the Rutgers University Presidential Citation, the New Jersey Turfgrass Hall of Fame Award, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of New Jersey's Distinguished Service Award, the National Irrigation Association's Man of the Year Award, and most recently the 1993 STMA President's Award.

Caton's Path

On a different path, but one that would eventually meet with Indyk's, an eager young student, a four-sport letterman in high school, entered Bloomsburg State Teachers College (now Bloomsburg University) on a football scholarship. After "wrecking a knee" in football, Richard G. Caton switched his athletic emphasis to track, completed his bachelor's degree in secondary school education and social studies, and moved to Woodbury, NJ, to teach and coach. His expertise and enthusiasm in that position

were rewarded when he was honored with the Princeton Prize for Distinguished Service to the Secondary School System. The prize includes a cash reward and the presentation of books to the school library.

True to his calling, Caton used the funds to work toward his master's degree in education, administration and superintendency at Rutgers University. He advanced from a teaching position to assistant superintendent of the Woodbury school system during his 16 years there.

At that point, Caton took a sabbatical for a year of residency at Temple University to pursue his doctoral degree. A graduate fellowship helped ease the financial burden of the move.

He completed his doctoral degree within two years, but even before that he attained the superintendent position at Wardentown, NJ. He later moved on to superintendent positions at Maple Shade and then Buena, NJ.

After 30 years of service, Dr. Caton retired in 1986. During that period, his continuing dedication to his work made a significant impact on the statewide scholastic community. His peers chose him as the recipient of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators Distinguished Service Award.

Teaming Up

With his strong athletic background, coaching experience, and continued responsibility to student athletes, Caton had long held concern for athletic field conditions. While superintendent at Maple Shade, he hired The Greenway Group to help with a field problem. He was so impressed with the job they did and their professionalism that he recommended their services to fellow superintendents whose sports fields were in bad shape.

Shortly after Caton retired, The Greenway Group made him an offer he couldn't refuse. "They said my experience 'gained by osmosis' would complement their program," he recalls. "November 1, 1993, marked the first day of my eighth year with the company."

Initially, Caton concentrated on sales and marketing, with 90 percent of his time spent on school districts. His work increased the size and profitability of the company. About four years ago, he says, "It dawned on me that a lot of people were profiting from selling information, and dispensing information was a major part of our work. I convinced company leadership that a division solely offer-

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ing professional consultation would be a winner, if we could sign the best personnel in the industry. At that point, I heard Dr. Indyk speak at a Loft's Field Day, and was so impressed with his ability I told Greenway, 'I don't know what his status is or if he can be romanced to come to us, but we really need to try.'

The two men form a solid team for Turfcon, with the agronomic soils and turf expertise of Dr. Indyk — whom Caton calls "the best anywhere at what he does" — and the procedural expertise of Caton — whom Indyk calls "a master of technical documentation and accuracy." Working together, they support each other, bringing a higher degree of effectiveness to the project as each concentrates on his area of expertise.

Naturally, two such strong personalities generate a bit of friction at times with, Indyk notes, a few "disagreements and arguments" along the way. Caton agrees, conceding that "Henry always wins."

Their professional philosophy centers on carefully analyzing the specific situation at hand. "Too many projects work on general specifications, but they must be site-specific," Indyk explains. "The site must be analyzed properly to determine what conditions exist and then the specifications developed for those conditions. In addition, the project must be monitored to ensure that the specifications are carried out correctly."

"Each project is different, with different problems to solve, different challenges, different people and different contracting firms," he adds.

Along with the Stadium of the Future concept, another important Greenway, which Indyk "co-invented," is the Integrated Turf Management System®. This modular, transportable turfing system transports synthetic fields or problem turf areas to mature, natural turf.

"Modules are linked together to place soil to soil, leaf to leaf, and root to root to yield a playing field free from joints and other surface obstructions," explains Indyk.

The primary motivation for I.T.M. development began in 1990 with the stipulation that only natural turf be used for the World Cup Soccer matches of 1994. I.T.M. is a means of rapid conversion of a domed stadium's synthetic field to natural turf.

I.T.M. was used at the U.S. Golf Tournament held in June, 1993 at the Balustrade Golf Club in Springfield, NJ. After the practice tee was literally

destroyed by three days of practice, the worn turf was replaced overnight for the start of the tournament, and again for the last two days of the event, with highly successful results much appreciated by the players.

Caton recently spoke on professionalism at the 1993 STMA Conference and Exhibition in Baltimore, MD. His Sunday seminar was the last of a long day — a time slot almost guaranteed to foster apathy, even among the most education-starved individuals. Yet as Caton spoke, the room was exquisitely silent; all eyes and ear attuned to the man and

what he was saying. Of course, professionalism is a topic that comes easy to Caton — a subject in which both he and Indyk are fluent. It has always been the foundation for their seemingly different paths which, now merged, are producing a clear route for the future of sports turf. □

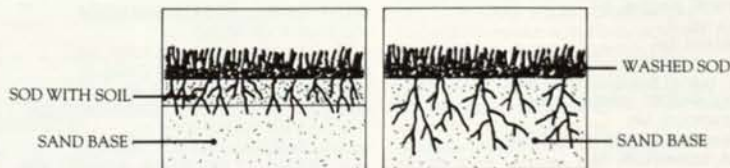
Editor's note: Bob Tracinski is the manager of public relations for the John Deere Company in Raleigh, NC, and public relations chairman for the Sports Turf Managers Association.

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