

# PICTURE PERFECT FIELD PAINTING AND STRIPING



Game-day field, painted and ready for play, at the University of Arizona. Photos courtesy: Chuck Raetzman.

By Matthew Trulio

**W**ithout lines and logos, a healthy, well-maintained field is an empty green canvas, awaiting your “brushstrokes.” Field painting and striping not only complete the play picture, but they challenge your precision as well as your creativity.

Chuck Raetzman, assistant director of operation services at the University of Arizona, and Ron Ramsey, the university’s paint shop supervisor, love to meet those challenges. Working closely

with one another and their crews, they’ve created a strategy that keeps the University of Arizona gridiron, the 1992 STMA Football Field of the Year, looking sharp.

## Timing Pays

Including the Copper Bowl, the University of Arizona hosts eight games a year. That’s not an especially high amount of play; however, most of the games are televised. The field has to be “television-ready” for every game.

“Timing is everything,” says Raetzman. “We coordinate with the paint shop during the season, not only with mowing, edging, and sweeping, but also with irrigation, so we’re not stepping on each other’s toes.”

Games are played on Saturdays. After Raetzman and his crew mow on Wednesdays, Ramsey and his team lay out the field and apply the “first coat” of lines, which takes approximately six hours. Thursday evenings, the field receives moderate to light irrigation, depending on the weather conditions.





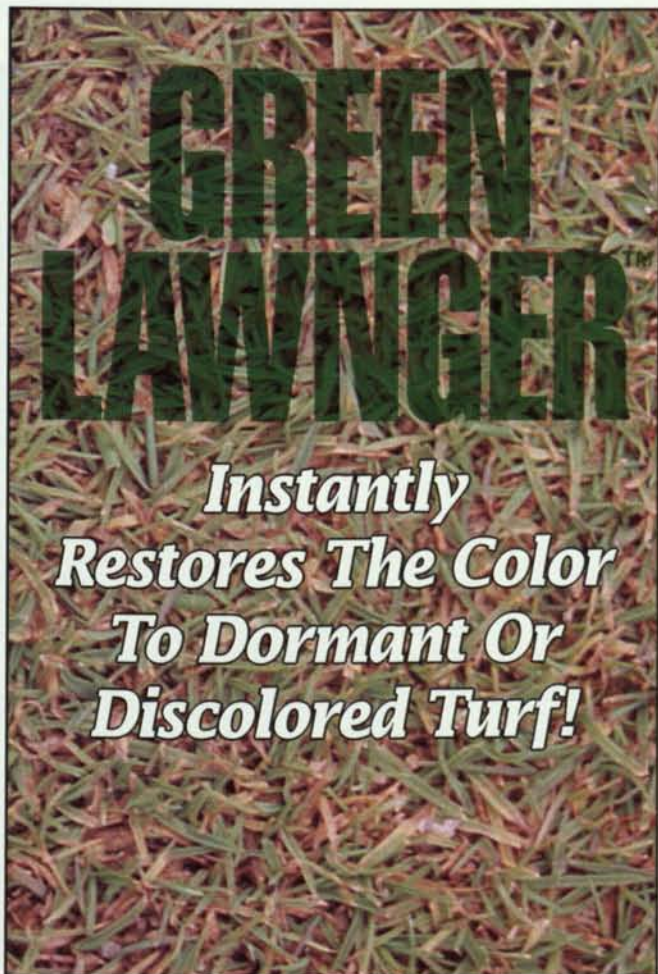
As numbers are painted individually using airless sprayers and custom made stencils.

On Friday mornings, the field is mowed and swept for the final time. Then Ramsey and the paint crew return to paint. They repaint the lines, stencil-

paint the yard markers, hash marks, and numbers, and paint logos in both end zones and the middle of the field. The field hosts a light, 40-minute practice early

Friday evenings, so the paint crew returns early Saturday morning to touch-up the field.

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"The team is very good about keeping that light practice between the 30-yard line and the end zone," says Raetzman.

### Winning Technique

When Ramsey and his crew begin painting on Wednesdays, they are starting with a smooth, cleanly cut field. That's important, says Ramsey, for laying down crisp lines from the start.

The University of Arizona's football field is surrounded by a curb with saw cuts in it every 10 yards. The Wednesday painting ritual begins with the crew running strings across the field, from cut to cut, then striping along the strings. "That's what we do on Wednesdays, stretch strings and stripe," says Ramsey. "From that point you measure where the yard markers, numbers and logos go."

Logos are laid out one week prior to the season opener, and kept outlined in white for the entire season. That way, when the crew returns to paint them on Fridays, the outline for the logo is already in place — finishing is a matter of filling in the color each week.

Numbers and hash marks are created with stencils made from pieces of half-inch plywood, hinged together at the center, which makes them easier to transport and store. The stencil configuration is such that they can lay out 20 yards at a time. To lighten the stencils and make them easier to carry, as well as provide a place for painters to stand while using them, the crew actually cut holes in them. The

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stencils were also painted with a primer followed by a high gloss paint, so that field paint can be washed off them quickly and easily. "If the stencil edges get 'dirty,' the edges of your numbers will get fuzzy," Ramsey notes.

The paint crew selects different tools for specific jobs. Airless paint machines are used for all logos, says Ramsey, because they create a particularly sharp line with no overspray. All five of the airless machines are gasoline-powered and can handle up to 200 feet of line.

"We need that much line because we don't bring any paint onto the field to prevent accidental spilling," says Ramsey. "Paint is kept on tarps off the field."

Logos are touched up on Saturdays by hand with paint rollers.

Conventional striping machines are used to paint all lines. Ramsey prefers a heavier machine that doesn't "bounce around" on the field. Each of the paint crew's three striping machines is self-propelled and has a seven-gallon paint tank, which Ramsey says is enough to stripe the entire field.

"When you stripe a field, you've got to keep your eye on the edge of your spray, so that you don't go over the strings," he asserts. "The edge of the spray has to be right 'on top' of the strings.

"You have to paint a field from various angles, because you want paint on all sides of the grass blade," he continues. "Otherwise, a logo or line might look green from one angle, colored from another. And you have to paint properly, so that the paint doesn't build up on the grass."

Regular mowing helps remove paint from the grass. In addition to diluting paint, "proper painting" includes selecting a field marking paint made for the job. Ramsey uses a water-based, flat latex paint that tends to be "chalky."

"You don't want to kill the grass — that's probably the most important thing — or you'll end up with a dirt field," he says. "There were three things we included in paint specification. One, it can't hurt the grass. Two, it can't hurt the players. And three, it can't come off on their uniforms, even in a rainy game. That's very important to equipment managers."

### Taking Pride

While field painting and striping can be challenging and time-consuming, they can also be immensely rewarding. A beautifully painted field "fires up" the teams and spectators. If televised, it fairly bursts from the screen. And a field-painting job done well gives everyone who worked on it a feeling of involvement and pride.

"We take a lot of pride in it," says Ramsey. "It makes our guys feel like they're part of the team. You've gone out there and done something that might help your team win — your team might get a first down that they wouldn't have had the lines been sloppy. When it comes down to it, lines are the most important paint on the field. The rest is just decoration."

Raetzman agrees. "This is a game of inches, and the lines have to be right," he concludes. "You can have the greatest grass field in the world, but what really gives it that look of class is the painting." □

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