

ROSE BOWL TO HOST WORLD CUP SOCCER FINALS

Top-quality, dense green turf covers the field.

Crowds pack the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, CA. Television, radio, and print media members vie for position. Hushed anticipation fills the worldwide home viewing and listening audience. Today, on this field, the championship will be decided.



Approximately 1,400 tons of new sand was brought in and the entire field was regraded to establish a one-percent crown over what would be the entire turf area. At points, the surface level was raised 6 inches from the field center. Photos courtesy: Neal Beeson.

By Bob Tracinski

It's July 17, 1994. After a grueling series of games, the play of two finalist teams will determine the best in World Cup Soccer.

All that and more will happen here, at the Rose Bowl, on U.S. soil. Behind the scenes, Richard Gonzales and his crew will smile, having shown the world that their turf can support the play of the best teams soccer has to offer.

The World Cup tournament, with 52 games in nine different venues (see "Gearing Up For World Cup" sidebar) kicked off with three exhibition games in early June. The second of these was played on June 4 at the Rose Bowl, just 31 days after the completion of major regrading and installation of new sod.

That renovation, and the interaction and cooperation that made it work, are

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another chapter in the ongoing book of what makes sports turf management so challenging and worthwhile.

Gearing Up

During the summer of 1993, the area of the Rose Bowl football field went through a major grade change in preparation for World Cup games. But in the spring of 1994, when members of the Architectural, Construction, and Turf (ACT) team did a field check on the area of play surrounding the traditional football field, the ball didn't roll true. The soil surface was steeper at the drain swales along the edge of the field, so the ball rolled toward the stands with a pronounced roll to the side. Gonzales describes it as "kind of a break in the roll. The ball would spin to the right or left when it reached the turf just beyond the football field."

At that time, the field had a one-percent grade from the crown to the outer edge of the playing area. The grade became steeper, three to four percent, beyond the field itself.

The solution was to change the grade to one percent from the crown of the field to within 12 feet of the perimeter of the stadium. That gave a 15-foot turf buffer, with the soccer field playing surface ending 27 feet from the walls of the stadium. With the consistent grade, the ball would then roll true.

Team-Building

To tackle this change, the World Cup Committee signed on Neal Beeson, owner of Sports Turf & Facility Management Company in Anaheim, CA, and a long-time consultant to the Rose Bowl.

"We've put the field in every year since 1983, so we know the site and the crew," says Beeson. "This project was definitely a joint effort. It wasn't accomplished by our company alone. The direct involvement of the Rose Bowl staff and crew were a big advantage, especially with the time frame we were facing. Richard knows that field inside and out."

Gonzales has been working at the Rose Bowl for almost 13 years. He's been there through traditional football seasons and bowl games, the May motocross events, concerts and shows, and

the soccer competition and finals of the 1984 Summer Olympics. His position, Public Worker Maintenance 4, is equivalent to foreman. He has a crew of four.

Gonzales is accustomed to the demands of the high-profile facility and views the World Cup as yet another major event. "We kind of take it (pre-event preparation) for granted," he says. "It's another cycle of getting the field ready to produce revenue."

Gonzales and Beeson have worked together on major field renovation many times during the past 11 years. They've worked on a motocross track, then replaced the field after the event was completed, and much more. That particular job was good preparation for the World Cup work, since it required regrading and resodding in seven days. They know what to expect from one another — they know how to work with each other's crew. They know how important it is to remain flexible and work as one team.

"I'd hope that more on-site field personnel have direct involvement with reconstruction and renovation work of their fields," says Beeson. "The contractor has an obligation to those who inherit the results of his or her work. After

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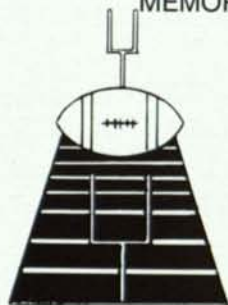
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all, the on-site crew members are the ones who 'live with' the changes that are made. It's their work that turns a 'project' into a long-term asset: a thriving, highly playable field."

Implementing The Plan

To prepare for World Cup play, the existing sod was cut, scraped up, and hauled away. Approximately 1,400 tons of new graded sand was brought in and the entire field was regraded to establish the one-percent crown over what would be the entire turf area. At points, the surface level was raised 6 inches from the field center back to the sidelines.

"The field has exceptional drainage," says Beeson. "We worked through 3/4-inch of rain, with no puddling. Drainage is one of the biggest concerns of the Rose Bowl administrative staff, the Tournament of Roses Committee, and the City of Pasadena. The existing subsurface drainage system contains hard pipes that lead to subsurface lines at the edge of the field. They don't want a lesser system when the World Cup moves out. Part of the agreement with World Cup is that the committee will pick up the costs of putting the field back in shape, if

necessary, after the events are completed. Our company also is basically 'on-call' for the month following project completion to handle whatever concerns the committee wants addressed."

Gonzales and crew tackled changes to the irrigation system. Sprinkler heads had to be raised to accommodate the change in grade.

Laying of Tifgreen bermudagrass sod started May 1. As Beeson says, "Every project has unusual twists, and this one was no exception."

Because the net poles used for football were still in place, 8,000 square feet of sod were removed on May 2 to allow a pathway for the heavy crane that was needed to take out the poles. That section was reworked and the sod was re-laid. Sodding was completed May 4.

"We mowed for the first time on May 10," says Gonzales. "The initial cut was to a height of 1/2 inch. Game cut height will be determined by the World Cup Committee. They might stay at 1/2 inch or go to 5/8 or 7/8 inch. They want as much consistency as possible throughout all nine venues."

ACT team member Steve Cockerham of the University of California, Riverside,

and Steve Wightman, San Diego Jack Murphy Stadium field manager who serves as the World Cup "detail guy" at the Rose Bowl, made on-site visits to offer suggestions and guidance. They will consult at the Rose Bowl while World Cup "controls" it through the finals. Since the Rose Bowl field is the "standard" for other venues to match, it was and is essential for Gonzales to work with Cockerham and Wightman every step of the way. During World Cup control, Gonzales, as on-site manager, communicates with them daily.

With the exhibition game on June 4, post-renovation field preparations had to move quickly. Gonzales says, "We replaced a few stressed patches of sod on May 11. On May 16 we core aerated, followed by verticutting, then top-dressed with silver 30 sand. After the sand was on and worked in, we followed with a complete fertilization, according to recommendations by the O.M. Scott Company, the World Cup consultant for fertilization. We plan to fertilize every five days through the finals. In addition, two days prior to play we'll make an application of liquid iron for

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optimum green-up. The irrigation schedule has to be dependent on the rate the new sod takes hold and weather conditions. We'd like to see more 80-degree days to get the bermudagrass well-established, but that's not something we can control.

"We want the field to be in top shape for the World Cup competition, but we're looking at the long-term, too," he adds. "We're hoping to be able keep the grade as it is now after World Cup play. That way, the field can be used for both soccer and football. In any event, we'll be sticking with the basics when it comes to turf care.

"Basic, post-construction preparation for World Cup has been much like that of the motocross racing held here in early May," Gonzales continues. "In the years we haven't had motocross and its post-race renovation, we've removed the overseeded perennial ryegrass and stimulated the bermudagrass with cultural practices. The only sod we've had to replace is in the areas heavily painted for New Year's Day.

"Once the field is established, we expect it to hold up well. As we observed during the Olympics, soccer puts less wear and tear on the field than the regular football season," Gonzales notes. "Football travels with 45 players on a team, so there are 90 players plus the coaches and full support staff on the sidelines. Football players as a rule are pretty big guys. Time after time during the game, they dig into a trench to hold the line and try to knock the opposing players onto the field and out of the action. Soccer players are usually lighter in weight. They're moving all the time, with play spread out over a broader section of the field. Generally, the referee, confined to a specific segment of the field, does more turf damage than the players."

World Watching

During the actual games, and especially at the finals, media coverage from all over the world will be intense. Soccer is the premier sport outside the U.S., drawing highly involved and devoted fans. They'll want all the information they can get on their teams and their performance. Every detail of every field

and facility will be observed and become fodder for commentary. Fortunately for Gonzales, he and his crew have gained plenty of media savvy over the years.

"We've had the Olympic experience, along with the regular in-season football games that are televised, the Rose Bowl's traditional New Year's Day kickoff, two Super Bowls and many other events," he says. "We do our best to accommodate the needs of media personnel."

Though sports turf management is mainly a behind-the-scenes profession, there is a "perk" connected with working on a high-profile field. As Gonzales and his crew have discovered, the media can do a great job of "showing off" their hard work. □

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

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