



In a field northeast of Palm Springs, CA, workers harvest and roll sod destined for the Super Bowl in Phoenix.

Evolution Of A Super Field

By Stephen Guise

Anyone lucky enough to attend a Super Bowl knows first-hand that its "hoopla" is truly an experience of a lifetime. But it's not all fun and games. Since the National Football League accepts nothing but the best playing field for its ultimate game, preparation for the Super Bowl starts months ahead of time.

For this year's Super Bowl, and perhaps for subsequent ones, it began in October 1994, when devastating frost and ice hammered Florida and the East Coast's turfgrass industry. The damage caused a shortage of the preferred overseeded Bermudagrass sod. Needing a playing surface for the 1995 Super Bowl at Joe Robbie Stadium in Miami, NFL consultant George Toma knew he had to look west and contacted West Coast Turf, a Southern California turfgrass sod producer.

Just days following his call, 28 truck loads of refrigerated thick-cut sod rolled out the gates of West Coast Turf for a 3,000-mile trek across the country. The on-site stadium crew, rounded up by groundskeeper Alan Sigwardt, helped Toma install the new field in record time. The field, come game day, was outstanding. It was then, one year away from the 1996 Super Bowl at Sun Devil



As in years past, the sod for this year's Super Bowl was raised and laid under the direction of George Toma. Photos courtesy: West Coast Turf.

Stadium in Arizona, that the NFL decided to purchase the field for this year's Super Bowl.

Many sports turf managers have questioned this move: Why would anyone purchase a new field one year prior to a game without knowing the condition of

the existing field? The answer is easy when one understands the calendar of events at Sun Devil Stadium. It hosts Arizona State University, the NFL's Arizona Cardinals, and the Tostitos Bowl (Fiesta Bowl), which was played just three and a half weeks before the Super Bowl. The NFL's field team knew that this amount of play would be too much to handle.

The evolution of advance planning for the best possible playing surface had been reached. After 30 years of preparing the field for Super Bowls, Toma would finally have the field of his dreams, without the ulcers.

Twelve months prior to the game between the Steelers and Cowboys, the sod was purchased and prepared in the warm climate of Bermuda Dunes, CA, located just northeast of Palm Springs. In November of this past year, Joe Foster, vice president of West Coast Turf, explained the condition, "I had roots down eight-plus inches and the Tifway Bermudagrass was thriving. We overseeded the fields with a blend of perennial ryegrass at a rate of 30 pounds per 1,000 square feet in October."

As fall approached, Foster applied Primo, a growth regulator, to slow down the actively growing Tifway 419

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Super Bowl Sod

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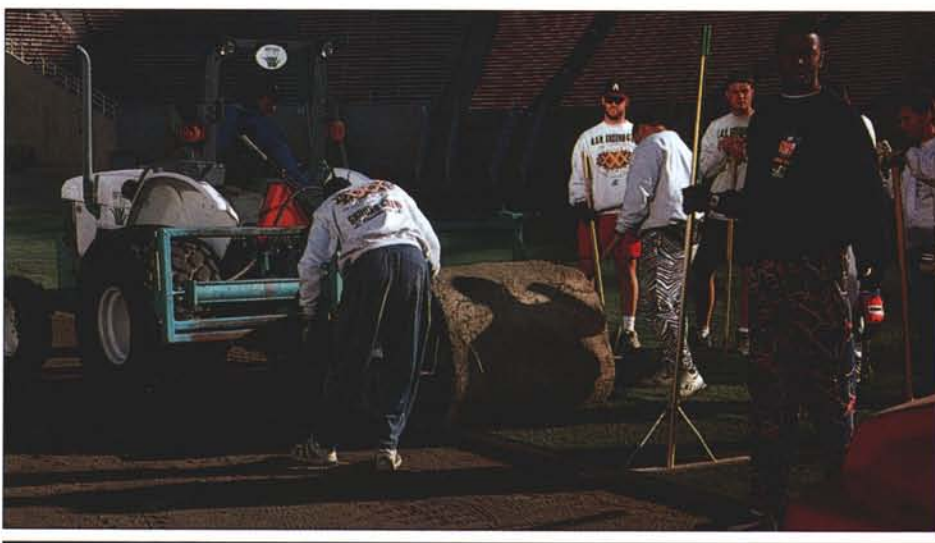
Bermudagrass and to reduce the competition for the overseeding process.

The fertility programs were kept at one pound of active nitrogen per month using urea as the source. Prior to overseeding, an application of pre-plant fertilizer (6-20-20) was applied at the rate of 400 pounds per acre. Sulphate of potash had been applied to harden off the grass 30 days prior to the harvest date. This would aid the turfgrass in the event of a potential frost. The grass was manicured and cut at a height of 7/8 of an inch and was ready for delivery. Within four weeks, by December 1st, the fields were dark green and lush.

In an area of the state where produce is grown, turfgrass thrives. The weather patterns this year have been challenging throughout Southern California and particularly in the high desert area of Bermuda Dunes. Ammonia nitrate was used during the cooler periods for a nitrogen fertilizer. Foliar applications of Sprint, an iron micronutrient fertilizer



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The Super Bowl XXX crew lays the two-inch sod as soon as it arrives.

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produced by Ciba-Geigy, were applied weekly at the suggested label rate, starting three weeks prior to harvest, to increase the turf's natural color.

As the East Coast was spreading urea on snow and ice during the worst storm to hit the Northeast in 70 years, Toma awaited his best friend to arrive at sunny Sun Devil Stadium: green grass! The huge rolls of two-inch-thick sod came rolling in on January 5th, just 23 days before the big event. It took only three days to lay the new turfgrass on the warm soil of Arizona. George Toma's Super Bowl ground crew — including Ed Magnum, groundskeeper for the World Series Champion Atlanta Braves — were together again.

It takes many people from around the U.S. to prepare the Super Bowl field each year — people from many walks of life, with separate expertise and

personalities. Glued together as a team with a common goal, they provide the best playing surface for the enjoyment of millions of observers and for the safety of players who gained the opportunity to represent their fans on that winter afternoon in January.

But that is only part of the Super Bowl turf's story. After the big day, Sun Devil Stadium manager Don Follett had to start "deconstructing" the field, to bring the heavily overseeded turf back to a 100-percent Tifway 419 Bermudagrass field. Look for "Super Bowl Field — Post Game Report" in an upcoming issue. □

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