

# FRONT LINES

## Just Another Crisis

By Steve Guise

In his 55 years as a sports turf manager, George Toma has dealt with a lot of crises. Barry Mohon, long-time construction supervisor for West Coast Turf in Southern California, remembers one in San Francisco's Candlestick Park in January 1993 after a rain-soaked divisional playoff

Also plaguing the work was a labor shortage, and matters were only getting worse. The existing crews were exhausted, tempers were short, and conflicts had arisen among the men.

Running further and further behind schedule, Mohon finally turned to Toma to see if he could provide the extra help it would take to get ready for the game.

When asked, Toma looked at Mohon and said, "Give me one hour and I will get you the help." With that, Toma left



**A storm dropped an average of two inches of rain per day on the field.**



**A rain-soaked divisional playoff game between the 49ers and the Redskins had left Candlestick's field mangled. Photos courtesy: George Toma.**

game between the 49ers and the Washington Redskins. The teams had mangled the field, and Mohon was called in to help repair it for the next game, the NFC championship.

### Getting the Job Done

The "scariest experience I've had in my 33 years in the business" is how Barry Mohon describes the resodding of Candlestick for the NFC title game between the 49ers and the Dallas Cowboys.

Many people may remember the photos in newspapers around the world showing the resodding of the field for the big game. Mohon headed the team from West Coast Turf that worked hand-in-hand with George Toma's crews, which included stadium personnel.

Mohon sums up the conditions that week as they attempted to strip the field and cover it with thick-cut sod: "We had so much water on the field that they had to dig a hole in the end zone to collect and pump it out of the stadium. We pulled a tarp behind us as we laid the sod."

The water came from a weather system that had stalled over Candlestick Park and was dropping an average of two inches of rain per day on the field.

the stadium.

Mohon had no idea what Toma would do in the next 60 minutes. Waiting the results, he pulled his troops together under a tarp to get away from the rain and to pump coffee into their water-soaked bodies. As they sat there contemplating how they would provide the "services as promised" that West Coast Turf is



**For his "what it takes attitude" in preparing Candlestick for the January 1993 NFC title game, George Toma became the first groundskeeper to be named to football commentator John Madden's "All-Madden Team."**

known for, they heard the sound of a helicopter approaching.

Appearing through the clouds and fog, the helicopter landed on the parking lot. Out of the haze walked three men — the mayor of San Francisco, the owner of the San Francisco 49ers, and Toma.

Rain was now coming down in buckets as Mohon watched the two businessmen walk onto the muddy field with Toma to observe the dilemma. The men stood there for a moment, and turned to Toma, who was speaking.

"I couldn't hear what was being said," Mohon remembers, "but George was waving his arms, and these two guys in suits were standing listening to George explaining the solution. As the two men left, their helicopter circled the stadium for one last look. George walked back to us with a smile on his face and that bright inner glow in his eyes."

The problem had been solved. The mayor agreed to send in a park-and-rec crew to alleviate the labor shortage so the job could get done on time. The field on game day was rough around the edges, but the playability was excellent, earning Toma a spot that year on sports commentator John Madden's "All-Madden Team." □

*Stephen H. Guise, president-elect of the STMA, is sports turf manager for the Sports Turf division of Valley Crest, Calabasas, Calif.*

*If you have a story or anecdote you would like to share, call (562) 425-2449 or write it down (include your name and phone number) and mail it to Ashman & Associates, 3164 North Greenbrier Road, Long Beach, CA 90808.*