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Around the Grounds

My internship with Mark Razum at Coors Field

BY DON FRANTZ

My past two summers have been life changing. I've been fortunate enough to serve as the first-ever intern for Mark Razum, head groundskeeper for Coors Field and the Colorado Rockies. With my interest in sports turf, especially baseball fields, it was a dream internship.

When I was younger, my favorite baseball player was Jose Canseco. I noticed something special about the surface that he played on—it looked perfect to me. I did some homework and discovered a guy named Mark Razum took care of that field.

That was a long time ago, and now I study turf at Colorado State University, while Mark works in at Coors Field in Denver. It took some serious marketing of myself to get the coveted internship, and when I realized that I was the first intern that Mark had ever hired, I felt obligated to not let him down.

In that first season, Raz gave me chances to do the things that go into creating a well-manicured MLB park. He unselfishly discussed his philosophy as head groundskeeper: that the main objective is a safe playing surface, and that aesthetics is not an objective, but rather a byproduct of a proper field. He said consistency is important and the field should be tailored as the team's manager dictates.

"Leonardo da Vinci used all of his senses in creating his art," Raz said once while I was doing the soil samples. He's right. This job is different everyday, and being aware of what's around you, from the weather that's building, to what birds are hanging around, and the smell of the soil helps in seeing the whole picture.

Last year we replaced the turf at Coors Field. This was a priceless opportunity for me to see how sod is stripped, the field laser leveled, and then help lay the big-roll sod. Midway through we had to order more sod and another crew member and I had to estimate how many square feet were needed. We estimated perfectly; just



one example of how much trust Raz put in me and the rest of his crew.

Sunshine on his shoulders

Though the Rockies were expecting to have a great year in 2001, it wasn't to be, which is hard on the grounds crew, their biggest fans. But this summer's internship showed me the management part of the job, everything from budgeting, fertilizer applications (my favorite thing to do along with aerating), ordering products, and personnel management.

My main responsibility was the care and management of the sod farm (nursery) outside of the stadium which gave me a chance to have my own field and it allowed me do a little turf research (secretly of course). I also observed how groundskeeper interacts with his employees.

So all you sports turf managers, don't be afraid to hire today's turf students, and be willing to share your knowledge and experience with them. We come with a desire that you might wish all employees had and we are the professional groundskeepers of tomorrow. I am grateful for the knowledge that Mark Razum has shared so graciously with me over the past 2 years, and I look forward to representing the sports turf industry proudly in the future.

Don Frantz is a turf management student at Colorado State University in Ft Collins.



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