

## The eyes of a (baseball) nation

**G**ary VandenBerg didn't like the pay much but he couldn't pass up the opportunity to work in major league baseball (MLB) when the late STMA founder Harry "Pops" Gill offered him a job. Gary's love of baseball overwhelmed everything, including the paycheck.

By the time you read this, 22 years later, VandenBerg's groundskeeping experience will have been displayed for the entire baseball world during the All-Star Game at Milwaukee's Miller Park. I spoke with him just about a month before the Big Event, which is much more than simply an exhibition game between the two major leagues' elite players. In fact, MLB personnel were already at Miller Park working when we talked.

"There's the Futures Game, a Celebrity Softball Game, and the Home Run Derby before the big game," Gary said. "The most pressure during the entire week though will be to build a 300-foot long fence in 6 minutes for the Celebrity Softball game. This is a new fence made specifically for this event so we'll make some practice runs at putting it together. My crew plus about 30 volunteers will get it done."

The challenge is not to be ready for just a Tuesday night game, but to care for and protect the turf for a week before the game, too. The on-field rehearsals for the pre-game show begin every day a week before the first event and include the same production crew that worked the last Super Bowl halftime (let's hope Bono stays in Africa this time).

"Of course I want to protect the field and have it looking good for the 15-20 cameras and overhead blimp that cover every angle," said Gary. "All our preparation and watering must be done from 4 to 8 a.m. because every day and night some practice is going on. With so much going on it will be difficult to keep everything 100%."

"I'm excited about all the work that's already started. I'm sure I'll sleep in the office a few nights," Gary said. I asked if he's getting an All-Star bonus similar to what's included in some players' contracts. "No, no," he replied, adding that the Brewers' organization has always treated him well.

What advice does he have for a groundskeeper facing the Big Game? "I don't know yet, we haven't gotten through it," he said. "But I know already that you must be willing to change because things are changing every day. I'm glad to get this opportunity once, but that's enough!"

Life is funny. You'd think preparing his field for the All-Star Game would be the highlight of Gary's year, but it's not. The big news this summer in the VandenBerg house was son John's being selected by the Brewers in last month's amateur draft. Let's hope John joins his father soon, working at Miller Park.



**Comments always welcome.**  
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