

Talkin' Turf

with Steve LeGros

// I always asked questions and was willing to take on new responsibilities. //

Editor's Note: This is the first sports turf manager profile in an occasional series called "Talkin' Turf."

Steve LeGros, of Grass Stains Productions, co-produced with Penn State's Jeff Fowler the terrific "Like A Rock" video they screened at the STMA Awards Banquet last January. Great job, guys, everyone loved it.

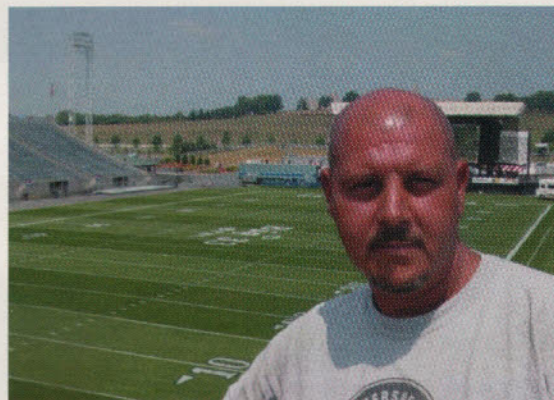
Steve also is the turfgrass specialist for Hersheypark Stadium, a sand-based field in Hershey, PA. Steve, thanks for taking the time to share some of your thoughts and practices for this inaugural "Talkin' Turf":

Q: How did you get started working with turf?

A.: I started in 1985 as an assistant golf pro in Orlando, in the 3-year apprentice program to become a teaching pro. You learn merchandising, marketing, along with course management and all the aspects of running a golf club. You are required to spend time on the greenskeeping side so that you are aware of what is done on a day to day. This is when the turf bug bit me! I withdrew from the apprenticeship program and started working at a course as a laborer.

Having no experience, I started off doing the most basic of tasks (weeding, edging, and raking traps.). I always asked questions and was willing to take on any new responsibilities. I did a lot of reading on turf and golf course management and eventually became an assistant superintendent.

In 1989 I accepted a position with the city of Maitland in Florida with the parks and recreation department, maintaining sports fields and common



grounds. I enjoyed the golf industry but the daily tasks were very repetitive, I wanted something that would be more diverse. And sports turf is that. Each day there is a new challenge.

Q.: Who was your mentor?

A.: My mother and father, they taught me that whatever you do give it a 110 percent or it's not worth doing it at all.

Also, my grandparents said that whatever I chose to do be sure that it was what I loved to do, nothing could be worse in life then having to go to a job every day that you didn't look forward to doing.

Q: What was your biggest challenge last year?

A.: Keeping the field playable this past fall, it rained at least 1 day a week if not more starting in September through December. And of course there many games played in the pouring rain, In November we hosted 18 games (seven games in 36 hours) and a drum and bugle corps competition. At this point the center of the field was becoming thin and unstable; we didn't have the time to resod before the next game, which was only 4 days away, so we had to find a way to make it safe and playable.

We topdressed from 10-yd. line to 10 yd. line, and from hashmark to hashmark with green sand. We then topdressed 1 ton of Turface on top of the sand, rolled it, and then broom dragged to loosen the top 1/16 inch, creating a baseball infield mix! It wasn't pretty, but the footing was fantastic. The players and officials loved it. The bottom line was that we provided a safe and playable surface.

We played the last 2 weeks in November like that, then we took the 3-point hitch blowers out and

blew most of the sand out toward the sidelines to prepare for the four state championship games that are in the first week of December. The "infield mix" protected the turf in the center of the field.

But with Murphy's Law we still were about to face are biggest challenges yet. Thirty-six hours before the first game it started to snow. We knew it was coming so we had the rain covers down. We would start blowing it off the covers whenever it started so it wouldn't have a chance to accumulate, well, we started blowing off the snow at 3 AM on Thursday when there was only a dusting on the cover. Six hours later it was still snowing at 1 in. an hour. At 4 PM it was still snowing and it had accumulated to about 4 in. on the field.

Meanwhile the entire stands were snow-covered only 19 hours before kickoff. We called out the troops, every able body came with shovels in hand, and we built two 50-ft. shoots out of tin and 2 x 4s as the snow was shot down to the track from the stands, skid loaders filled dump trucks.

It finally stopped snowing at 10 PM. With a plow attached to a work cart and the blowers we had the field completely uncovered at midnight and by 1 AM the cover was off. The only thing left to do now was to paint the field! We couldn't get it done prior due to the grooming we did on Monday and it started to drizzle on Tuesday when we put down the cover.

We had 7 hours before the pre game warm ups, (no sweat) all the logos, 3-ft. border, lines, numbers, and hashmarks. Did I mention that there are 4 of us to do this? We were taking the last three 5-yard strings up when the first teams came out for warm-ups.

Q: How do you get the most out of you crew?

A.: I make them a part of all decisions, we sit around a talk about how are we going to accomplish the upcoming schedule. Make a game plan. I make it a point every day to say thank you for a great job.

Q: What do you do away from your field to relax?

A: Get aggravated with my golf game. Take day trips

Q: What advice do you have for turf managers?

A: When you consider what we do, it doesn't get any better then this. Remember to keep it fun; we are providing entertainment and recreation to our communities. Sports are the most important thing in life, if only for a couple of hours at a time.

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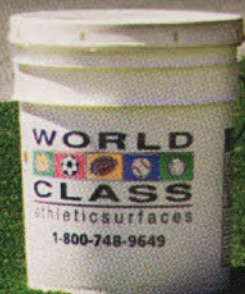
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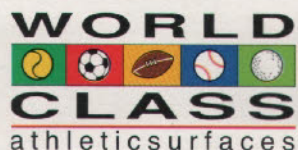
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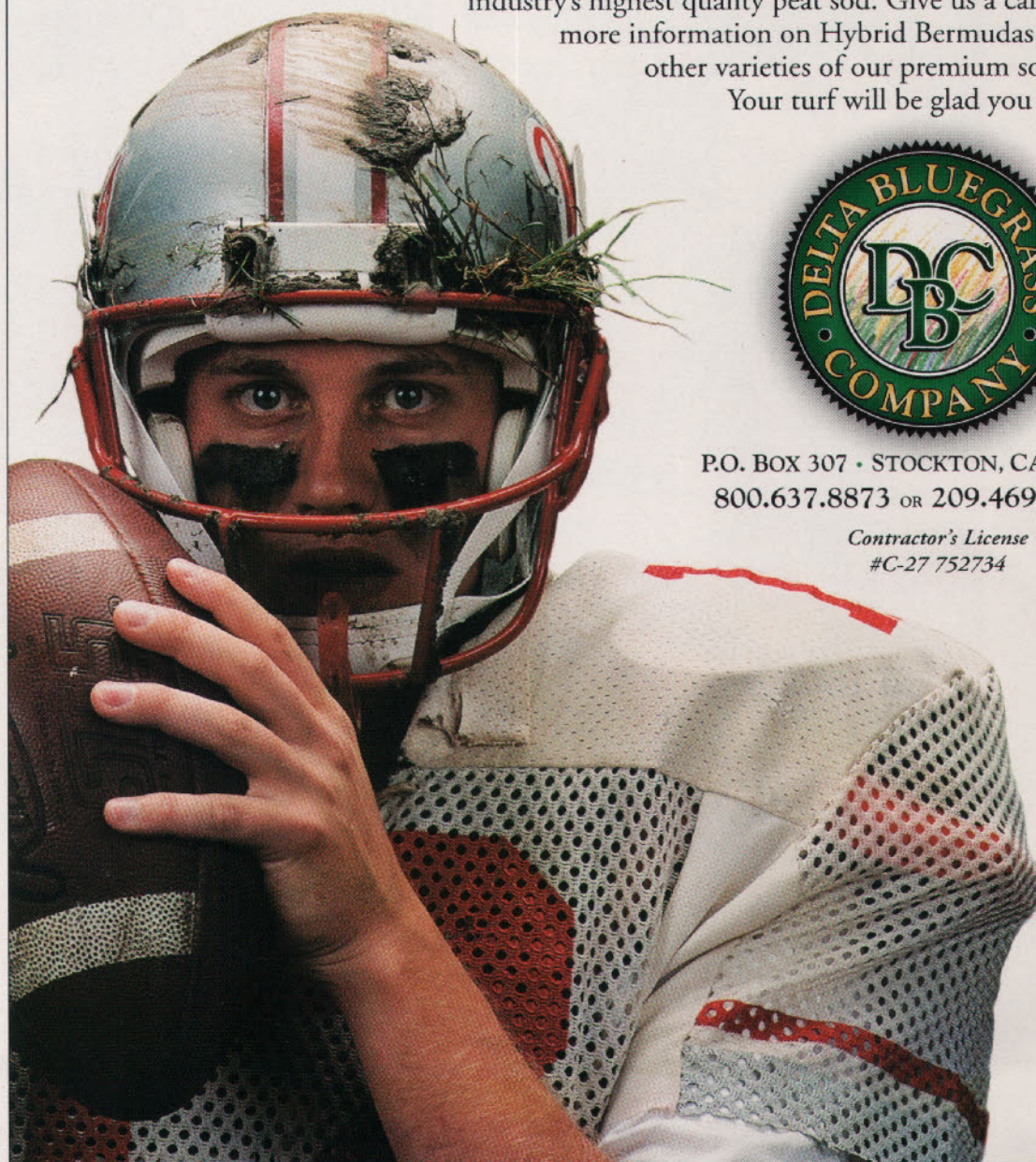
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Training in Tucson

Nearly 60 groundskeepers participated in the inaugural Roger Bossard 3-day Professional Sportsfield Institute in Tucson, AZ, last December. This one-of-a-kind training camp was developed to give groundskeepers at all skill levels access to major league expertise.

During the 3-day seminar, attendees got to walk through the steps needed to renovate an actual professional field. Working through problems in irrigation, soil conditioning and mowing, the group gained a unique perspective into the profession. The training was headed up by Roger Bossard, a world-renowned sportsfield builder and heads groundskeeper for the Chicago White Sox.

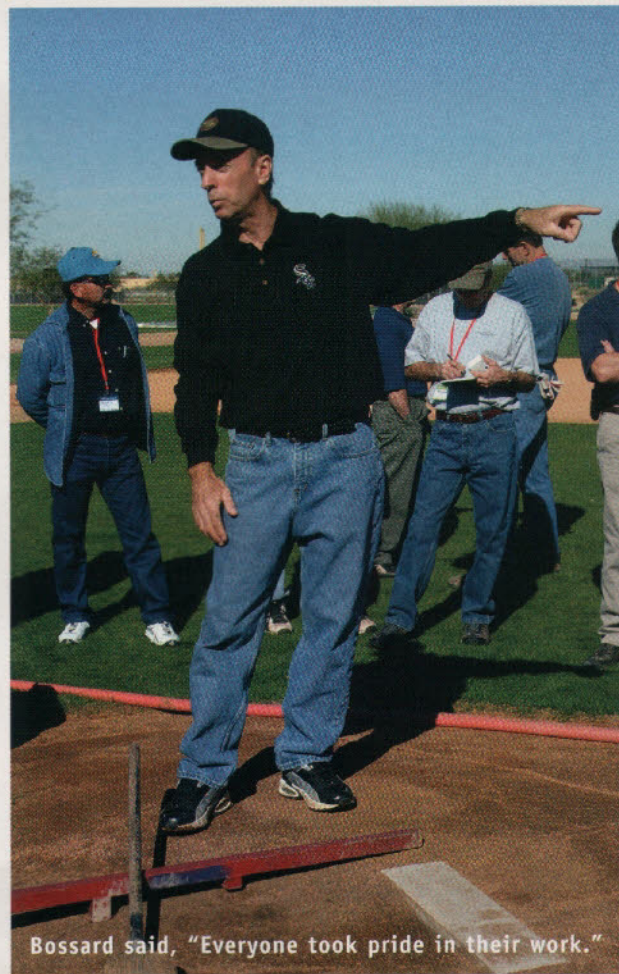
Alan Sigwardt, director of grounds and engineering for Pro Player Stadium, and Dr. Hank Wilkinson, a horticultural professor at the University of Illinois joined Bossard. Sigwardt brought a special knowledge of dual-use fields to the training and Wilkinson's expertise in building and maintaining natural grass sportsfields rounded out the curriculum.

"It was really a successful event," said Karl Rutherford, Professional Sportsfield Institute program coordinator. "We had people from many different jobs types and locations. There were groundskeepers from right there in Arizona and from as far away as Hawaii and Peru. I think the experience and knowledge they all brought with them made the event even more valuable."

Some of the topics covered during the program included design, construction and renovation of sportsfields; building of sportsfields from the ground up; disease, insects and weed control; daily upkeep; and special sportsfield problems.



Attendees came from as far as Peru.



Bossard said, "Everyone took pride in their work."

"The experience was fantastic," said Bossard. "I truly believe that it is our responsibility as groundkeepers to continue to develop our skills and enhance our value to the team. You could tell that everyone at the seminar took real pride in their work and they were all eager to learn ways to make their fields even better. I hope that everyone took away something new from the experience, I know I did."

Many of the attendees echoed Bossard's comments. "I've been to a lot of training seminars, but I learned more at this camp than the others com-

bined," one attendee stated. "I thought it was a great camp, it's nice to have training options out there," added another. "We got through an enormous amount of information in 3-days. We covered parts of field maintenance that I hadn't even considered."

"I thought the entire program was very professionally," said a parks and rec attendee. "If anything could make it better, I'd like it to be even more hands-on." One of the sportsfield builders added, "I thought the information was very extensive, if I could do one thing differently I would have brought along one or two of my colleagues so we could have shared the experience. It was a lot to learn in such a short time and I think having someone to talk about the program with when you get back home to your own field would help a lot."

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