Folsom Field of the University of Colorado earned the 2002 Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) Football Field of the Year Award in the College/University division. Folsom Field is on the University’s main campus in Boulder.

Football is huge in Colorado. The tradition of the 2001 Big 12 Champions football program began with Gamble Field, the original home of the Colorado Buffaloes. The 10,000-seat stadium was home for 20 years before the opening of the 30,000 seat Colorado Stadium in 1924. The stadium was renamed Folsom Field in 1944 after the death of legendary coach Frederic Folsom. In 1956, the addition of the upper deck increased seating capacity to 45,000. In 1991, the Dal Ward Athletic Center was built in the North end of the stadium housing coaches and administrative offices, locker rooms, training rooms, and weight room. In 2002, construction began on the east side of the stadium, adding skyboxes and club seating, with lights, which will bring seating capacity to over 53,000 by this month’s opening.

Before the 1971 season, the playing surface was a native soil topped with natural grass. AstroTurf was used from 1971 through 1998. In 1999, Folsom Field underwent a $1.2 million renovation, installing a sand-based natural grass field.

Field renovation and new field construction are a nearly continuous process in today’s sports environment. It’s very beneficial for the sports turf manager to be a part of the pre-construction decisions and the construction project process. Neither Jason DePaepe, athletic field manager, nor any of his three full-time employees were with the University for the 1999 renovation. DePaepe came to Colorado in June of 2000 as the assistant field manager. He had earned his BS degree in the turf program at Iowa State University and worked in both the turf research program and on Iowa State’s athletic facilities. In May of 1999, he joined the Baltimore Ravens where the practice facility was his primary responsibility. He assumed his position at CU in February 2001.

DePaepe says, “Prior to the Folsom Field reconstruction, the decision was made to use SportGrass to provide stability for the new field. SportGrass con-
The four varieties selected for the fibers and roots down through the sistsof artificial fibers tufted into a grown intermixed with the artificial horizontal backing. Graff's Turf blend were SR 2100, Award, Naglade and P-105.”

Field preparation followed the removal of the AstroTurf and subsystem. DePaepe says, “Four inch drain pipe on 16 foot centers was laid in 4 inches of pea gravel under 10 inches of a soil profile of 92 percent sand and 8 percent peat. An irrigation system was installed consisting of seven zones for the 62,000 square feet of turfgrass. An in-ground, 3 zone, glycol heating system also was installed. Once the field subsurface was completed and the sod was established, the SportGrass sod was harvested and laid on the new sand-based surface of Folsom Field. The field perimeter is 12 feet of AstroTurf which allows access to the field without traffic on the turf.”

The conversion from an artificial surface to natural turf received almost daily media coverage throughout the state and became a major discussion topic with the fans. University and athletic department officials and coaches were on hand and the TV cameras were rolling as the first roll of sod was laid. DePaepe says, “The addition of natural grass has made Folsom Field one of the greatest venues to watch college football. The Flatirons at the base of the Rocky Mountains that overlook the University of Colorado provide outstanding views and the short distance from the field to the fans helps them feel more involved in the game.”

The new surface brought a new set of challenges. DePaepe says, “The benefit of SportGrass is stability, especially in the first couple of years for a new field. The drawbacks are slow sod establishment, poor rooting, slow recovery from damage, a requirement of special equipment for aeration, and the inability to topdress on a regular basis. The stabilization fibers would be buried by topdressing and thus would be too deep to provide the footing for which they are designed. Raising or lowering an irrigation head requires cutting through the backing of the SportGrass with a saw and cutting a new hole for the head to come up through after adjustment.”

Field usage is another challenge facing the CU staff. There are events on Folsom Field every month of the growing season. Activity starts in April with one scrimmage and one spring football game. Graduation comes in May requiring Terraplas over half the field for 3 days. The Boulder Boulder 10K race is on Memorial Day. This event requires Terraplas over the entire surface for 4 days and culminates with 50,000 people finishing the race on Folsom Field. Football camps take the field for one week in June and July for at least one logo to help entice prospective recruits to theCU program. July brings at least 3 daysof soccer games plus the annual 4th of July concert with staging and fireworks. Football takes over the field in August for 8-10 hours. October brings three home games with walk-throughs. The last scheduled home game is in November, but there remains potential for bowl practice on the heated turf of the stadium.

DePaepe and crew decided to face these challenges with an aggressive, proactive approach. He says, “Field components and usage schedules were not what we would have chosen, but we do whatever it takes to provide the best fields possible. We, as a crew, just have to ‘Make It Work!’

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The biggest advantage is the safety factor, keeping the soil temperature warm to maintain the turf while relying heavily on the raw water supply. It allowed us to preclude the use of domestic water or ditch (raw) water. Having two sources of water has been much better in 2003, bringing reservoirs closer to normal levels and providing crucial last season as Colorado was hit with one of the worst droughts on record. We were able to keep the field supplied with enough water to sustain the grass plant crown.

While, over time, the fibers will get deeper with topdressing, we feel they'll still provide some melting, and deal with the aftermath of practice in those conditions. Now we only plow snow from the synthetic turf field. The coaches also hold practices on that surface rather than the natural grass practice fields during other potentially damaging weather conditions. This gives our players an acceptable place to practice and allows us to keep the natural turf in better condition on the other practice fields. I'm still a strong supporter of natural turf in most situations, and especially for the stadium game field, and our coaches and players prefer the natural turf.

DePaepe and crew work directly for the athletic department, concentrating mainly on outdoor sports facilities, but also helping move equipment or whatever else is needed to support the indoor sports programs.

Construction and renovation continue. The four-acre soccer practice facility and the outdoor track facility are both undergoing renovations this summer. Upgraded tennis courts also are under construction. Field security has been another challenge at Folsom Field. DePaepe says, "This year has been especially challenging with the skybox construction project. At night, the only barrier to the field is an eight-foot temporary construction fence. This has allowed several night football games on Folsom Field by trespassers. We look forward to the completion of the construction project and take heart in knowing the stadium addition will be a great benefit to our athletic department as a whole."

With this project, as with all the other elements of DePaepe's turf management program, it's a given that he and his crew will Make It Work!

Suz Trusty is communications director for the Sports Turf Managers Association. She can be reached at 800-323-3875.
March
Evergreen tarps are removed and aeration program is started
Core aerate with 3/4-inch hollow tines on 4-inch spacing in 2
directions - remove cores
Broadcast 150 pounds of bluegrass after every aerification
Topdress with 1/8-inch layer of sand
Seed worn areas in preparation for spring game
Mow three to five times per week at 1.25-inch height of cut

April
Aerate with 3/4-inch hollow tines on 4-inch spacing in 2 direc-
tions - remove cores
Broadcast 150 pounds of bluegrass after every aerification
Hand seed after spring game
Fertilize with increased Phosphorous for seed germination
Mow three to five times per week at 1.25-inch height of cut

May
Alter aeration schedule for post event compaction
Core aerate with 3/4-inch hollow tines on 4-inch spacing in 2
directions - remove cores
Broadcast 150 pounds of bluegrass after every aerification
Mow three to five times per week at 1.25-inch height of cut

June
Aerate with 3/4-inch hollow tines on 4-inch spacing in 2
directions - remove cores
Broadcast 150 pounds of bluegrass after every aerification
Topdress with 1/8-inch layer of sand
Increase Potassium to 1 pound for this month to reduce
summer stress
Hand seed with bluegrass after field events
Mow three to five times per week at 1.25-inch height of cut

July
Aerate with 3/4-inch hollow tines on 4-inch spacing in 2
directions - remove cores
Broadcast 150 pounds of bluegrass after every aerification
Hand seed with bluegrass after camps
Mow three to five times per week at 1.25-inch height of cut

August
Aerate with 3/4-inch hollow tines on 4-inch spacing in 2
directions - remove cores
Broadcast 150 pounds of bluegrass after every aerification
Hand seed with bluegrass after scrimmages
Mow three to five times per week at 1.25-inch height of cut

September
Aerate with solid tines
Broadcast 150 pounds of bluegrass after every aerification
Sweep after games to remove debris
Hand seed divots with pre-germinated bluegrass
Topdress with 1/32-inch layer of sand following games
Iron applications prior to first home game
Mow three to five times per week at 1.25-inch height of cut

October
Aerate with solid tines in 3 directions
Broadcast 150 pounds of bluegrass after every aerification
Turn on heating system to maintain soil temperature of 55
degrees F.
Sweep after games
Hand seed with perennial ryegrass after games
Topdress with 1/32-inch layer of sand following games

November/December
Aerate with solid tines in November
Aerate with 3/4-inch hollow tines in December - remove cores
Broadcast 150 pounds of bluegrass after every aerification
Mow as needed at 1.25-inch height of cut
Sweep after games
Hand replace divots after last game
Topdress with 1/32-inch layer of sand following games
Seed and topdress before putting evergreen tarps on for winter
Turn off heating system for winter