



DEALING

Preparing your field for winter weather is a challenging task. For insight into dealing with snowy and cold conditions, SPORTSTURF magazine recently spoke with Abby McNeal, CSFM, assistant turfgrass manager at Invesco Field at Mile High, home of the NFL's Denver Broncos. Abby also is an STMA Board member.

ST: What steps do you take to prepare your field for winter weather before it arrives?

McNeal: We prepare our field to be a safe and playable all year round. Our field maintenance program is geared toward playing football through January. From about August on we are looking at ways to adjust our maintenance practices to make the field play consistently safe for the football season. Our field has a geo-thermal heating system that enables us to keep the field at more ideal growing conditions later in the fall. Along with the use of Evergreen grow covers, we are able to provide a growing environment throughout the

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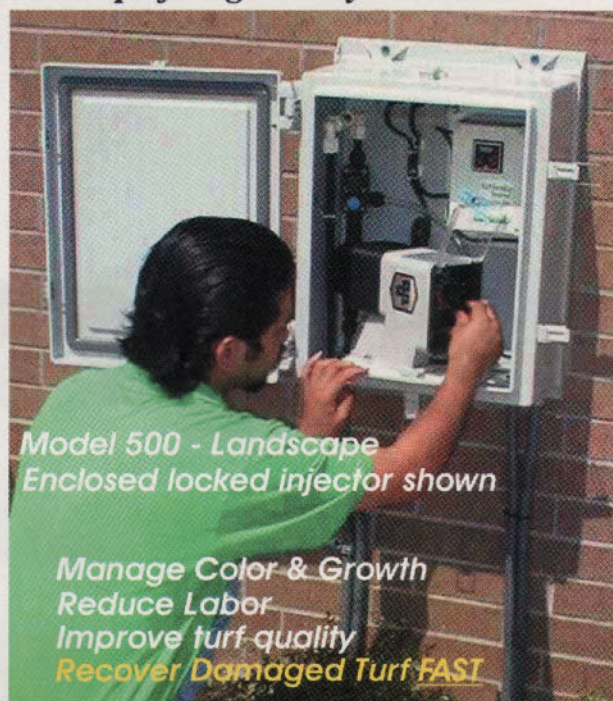
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WITH OLD MAN WINTER

winter months.

ST: On a more short-term level, what plans do you make for game day if snow is forecast?

McNeal: The NFL requires us to tarp the field if there is any threat of snow 72 hours before game day. We make sure our plows are ready to go and that we have the staff needed to deploy or pull up the tarps. If there is a chance of snow during the game, we prepare our game-day crew with shovels to clear the yard lines as well as orange paint in case we are asked by the head official to paint any yard line that may be hard to see in the weather. The tractors and other equipment are prepared in case they may be needed to assist with tarp removal.

ST: What is the best way to maintain a safe playing surface throughout the snowy and cold winter months?

McNeal: It is hard for me to answer this because our field was built to be played on throughout the winter months. Again, we use Evergreen grow covers and our field heating system to create a growing environment during months in which mother nature would prevent you from naturally doing so. Creating a safe playing surface is key no matter what time of the year it is. Asking other turf managers how they prepare their field for winter play in your particular area is the best way. Taking your field into winter in the healthiest possible way is the best way to prepare for winter play.

ST: What is the biggest challenge winter weather presents to you from a maintenance standpoint?

McNeal: The biggest challenge that we face is the tarping policy that the NFL has that requires us to tarp the field if there is a slight chance of snow. Making the right call as to tarp or not may be the biggest thing we have to decide.

ST

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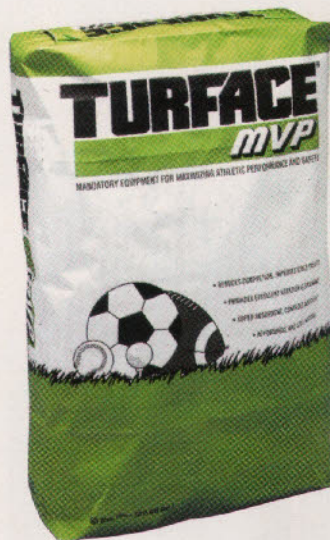
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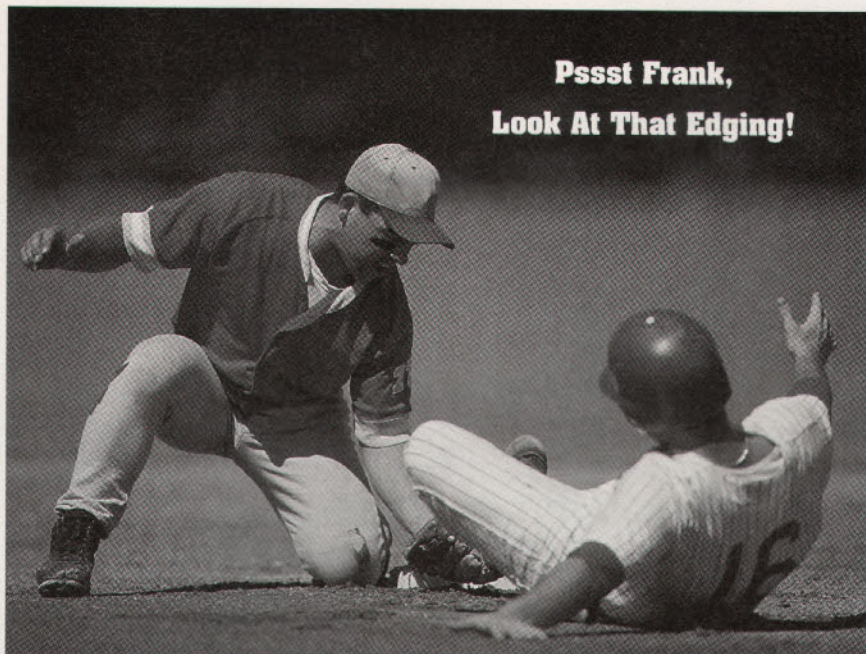
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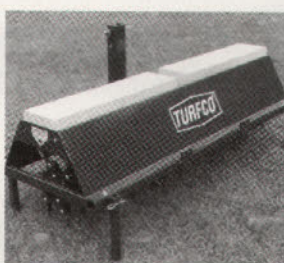
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around the grounds

PROPER MAINTENANCE FOR SNOW BLOWERS

Depending on where you live, your snow blower may sit unused for 8 months or more after winter weather ends. Be sure that your snow blower is ready for the task before the snow begins to fly again.

According to John Bailey, product manager for Husqvarna, there are three steps to preparing your snow blower: a careful inspection, replacement of worn parts, and a test drive of the unit.

Inspection

Carefully check the frame, auger housing, and auger or paddles. Look for worn out or loose parts, including:

- *The scraper bar, which is the part that makes contact with the ground and scrapes the snow up.
- *Screws and bolts: make sure they're tight and none are missing.
- *Belts: take the belt cover off and check for wear; check any idler pulleys, and make sure the bearings are not worn or the pulley is loose.

Replacement

After a thorough inspection:

- *Replace any worn out parts.
- *Drain the old gas from the tank and refill with fresh gas.
- *For two-cycle engines, replace the spark plug.
- *For four-cycle engines, check the oil and change it at least once a year, or following 20 hours of use.

Test drive

Make sure the snow blower is ready for action with a "test drive." Better to find out about any problems now instead of when the temperature is below freezing.

- *Let the unit run long enough to burn out any remaining old gas in the fuel line and carburetor.
- *After a few minutes, stop the engine, then start it again while the engine is warm.
- *After several hours, try to start it again. If it still starts easily, you should be ready to go.

Bailey also recommends reviewing your owner's manual for a complete guide to maintaining your specific snow blower model. For repairs or persistent problems, contact your local certified servicing dealer.

Provided by Husqvarna



BY ADAM SIVITS

"THE PAPER TURF ASSISTANT"



As a sportswriter, I have learned an unwritten rule: Don't mention the turf unless it's really, really bad.

Last season National Football League beat writers and columnists from coast to coast criticized the playing surfaces in Pittsburgh, New Jersey, and Tennessee, among others. If I were writing about it, I probably would not have mentioned either that these fields are overused or have other factors that contributed to declined turf quality.

Of course, that would have been *before* I became a turf assistant at Invesco Field at Mile High in Denver.

It never hurts to know people. I was looking for writing work last August in my hometown, Denver, when my friend Andrew Hoiberg asked if I'd like to be a seasonal turf assistant for the Broncos. He recently had been hired as a full-time employee after taking care of Denver's training camp fields in Greeley. I told him that the only thing I knew about grass was that it grew and turned brown without enough water. He assured me that it would be OK.

My first day we painted the field for a preseason game. There were lots of strings and many, many buckets of paint. It's fascinating how easily an area of turf more than 7,000 square yards can be transformed into a beautiful playing surface. Don't get me wrong, it's not easy. It can take up to three full days, with a crew of eight or so painting, to get the media lines, sidelines, yard lines and hashes, endzones and any logos done. And it's amazingly simple, using just some string and metal stencils, or sliders.

Painting, however, was not all that I had to get my hands dirty. Over the next few months I learned about topdressing, seed germination, grow tarps, mowing patterns, soil temps, diseases, and the differences between grasses.

As an assistant, there's a lot of grunt work. The seasonal assistants empty the grass clippings from the Versa-Vac (which smelled like month-old compost), take down or put up the goal posts (boy, those crossbars are heavy), load up the Workmans with sand from outside the stadium or hand-rake the field and hand-fill the divots (which were relatively minor, thanks to the DD Grassmaster system) the day after a game. There's lots of sweeping and scrubbing.

Of course, those tasks paled in comparison to the tarps. In a late-August preseason game against Seattle, a monster thunderstorm decided to hunker down over the Denver metro area hours before kickoff. We scrambled sloppily to get the rain tarps out in time, and even then we had to call in reinforcements. We had cleaning crews, engineers and even cheerleaders helping us out. To keep the tarp from being blown all over by the swirling winds, we ended up putting the metal sideline benches on every conceivable corner and parking about a dozen vehicles in various spots. After the torrential downpour, we removed the weights, pushed the excess water off the tarps and rolled them up.

For a second, though, standing in the heart of a giant, round metal conductor, right smack-dab in the middle of two metal benches, in the midst of a potential tornado-causing thunderstorm didn't sound like the greatest way to spend an afternoon. In the end, however, the field looked and played fantastic.

Against the Colts in late November, another weather fiasco loomed overhead; only this time our crew had to deploy the snow tarps, which had actually only been rolled out in an August mock run. The snow tarps were considerably larger than the rain tarps and had seamless zipper ends, which made them extremely more difficult to fasten together, especially in near-freezing temps.

After a tremendous show of teamwork, the playing surface, and the larger pieces of the bench tarp that we had nailed down earlier, was covered. We arrived the next morning at 7 AM for that night's 6:30 PM kickoff, and at about 10 AM we began to plow the

tarps. By 2 PM the tarps were rolled up and the field was ready to go.

But the rough stuff was miniscule compared to the good times. For every time I had to crawl under the stands to make sure the heating plugs around the irrigation pumps were plugged in, there were ten times I got to hop on the Sidewinder mower or the John Deere tractor, or just throw the football around out on the field.

No matter how many paint buckets I had to scrub, it was all more than worth it to work the field goal nets in the north endzone and watch the games from the greatest seat in the house: the field.

Maybe I was spoiled, being such a novice and getting to work with Turf Manager Ross Kurcab, his assistant Abby McNeal, Hoiberg and their remarkable crew. I was just lucky.

ST

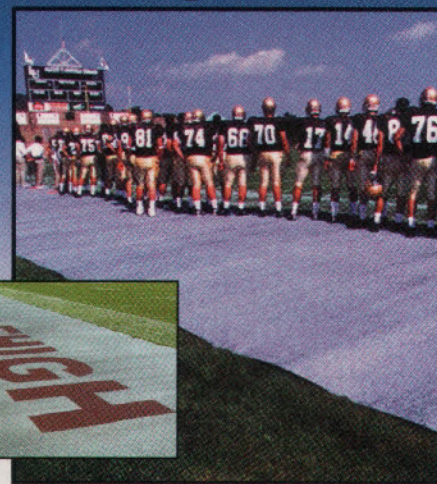
Adam Sivits is currently trying to grow a writing career in New York City. He can be reached at adamsivits@yahoo.com.

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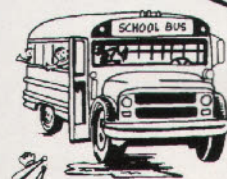
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