



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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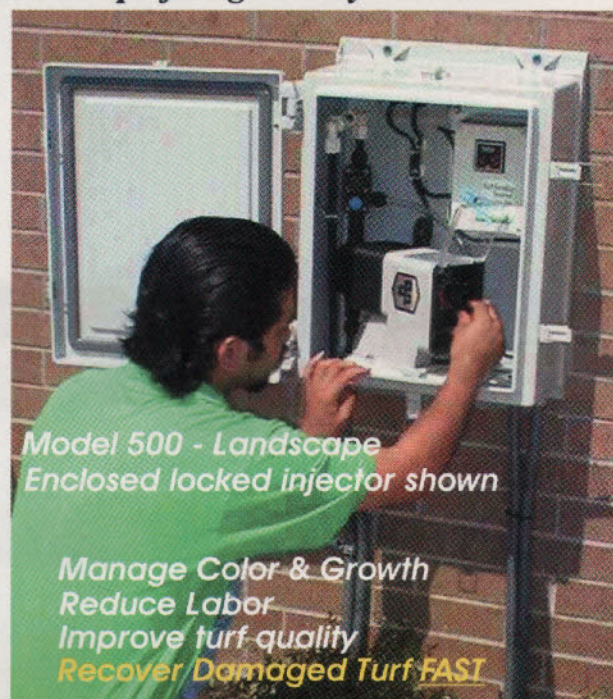
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WITH OLD MAN WINTER

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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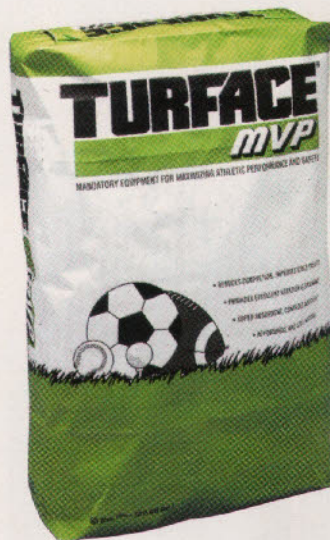
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