

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

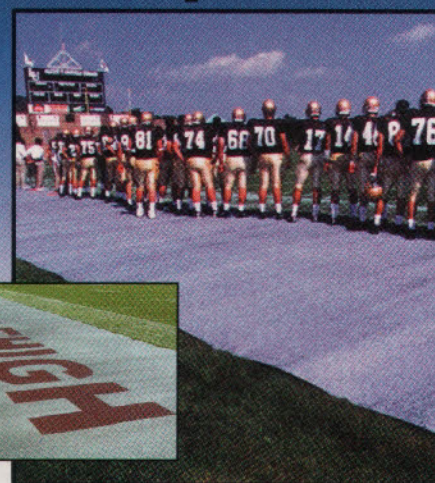
Adam Sivits is currently trying to grow a writing career in New York City. He can be reached at adamsivits@yahoo.com.

It's your turf - keep it safe...

FieldSaver™ Football Sideline Covers—
only from
CoverSports USA



FieldSaver™ Sideline Tarps
can be personalized to
your specifications



- Save your sidelines - real grass or artificial turf
- Heavy-duty construction stands up to the toughest football teams
- Durable polypropylene fiber lets air and water pass through
- 5 Stock sizes from 14' x 50' to 14' x 150'
- We will customize by size, school name and logo
- Full field rain covers also available

Protects and preserves your sidelines

COVER SPORTS USA

A Division of Humphrys Manufacturing

Your All-American Advantage

5744 Woodland Ave., Phila., PA 19143
800.445.6680 Fax: 215.724.8706

www.coversports.biz
email: sales@coversports.biz

© 2003, CoverSports USA

Circle 167 on card or www.oners.ims.ca/2084-167