

Home Depot Center handles special events

Early evening shot of the Stadium Field set up for the NCAA Division I Men's Soccer College Cup.

BY SUZ TRUSTY

When Kyle Waters tells new acquaintances he works for the Home Depot Center, most people ask him, "Which department?" It takes a while to explain he's in charge of the fields and grounds, including the extensive landscaping, of the sports event showplace in Carson, CA.

Home Depot Center is a 125-acre sports development with a 27,000-seat soccer stadium, a track & field facility, an indoor velodrome, an 8,000-seat tennis stadium, nine additional soccer training fields, and multiple additional tennis courts. It is the home of Major League Soccer's Los Angeles Galaxy and of Chivas USA, a new MLS team. It's the US Soccer Federation National Team's Training Headquarters and an official training site for US Track & Field. It was the training camp for the San Diego Chargers last season and hosted the NCAA Division I Men's Soccer College Cup in December, along with numerous other major sports events and a few concerts. Maybe you saw it on TV during the X Games or in that Chevrolet truck commercial with Howie Long.

Waters says, "It's hard to explain the concept of a multi-use, high traffic facility to anyone outside the industry, especially one with so many different events going on, often at the same time. Industry insiders understand the driving forces in making it all work are our outstanding crew and supportive management team."

The stadium field, and fields 1 through 5 have the same basic structure. Each has a subsurface drainage system with drainpipes on 15-foot centers connected to the storm drain system. This is topped with a 6-inch USGA spec sand-based soil profile. Each was sodded with Bull's-Eye Bermudagrass and has been overseeded with perennial ryegrass.

The additional 8 acres of practice and multi-purpose fields have a clay pan base with a 4-inch sand-based cap and Bermudagrass sod. This area can be laid out in multiple configurations to meet needs. It's been set up as 22 small soccer fields. The typical layout for the Chargers practices is one full size and three half-size football fields. The complex also includes one synthetic FieldTurf soccer

field. Construction on a second began in late February.

There are four clay-surface tennis courts that the crew maintains with a regimen similar to that of the skinned area of a baseball infield. The 18 hard-surfaced tennis courts require little staff time. An outside contractor on a preset schedule washes them. Waters' crew maintains the 3-mile DG running trail with 12 fitness stations that run around the perimeter of Home Depot Center.

They're also responsible for the approximately 20 acres of ornamental turf. This includes 14,000 square feet of newly installed sod that replaced an area of

flowerbeds. "That section of flowerbeds was between the main drive and the practice fields," notes Waters. "Many players and fans opted for the direct route, through the flowers, rather than detouring around it on the existing walkways. I believe it is more realistic to recognize users' traffic patterns and accommodate them when possible than to go against the natural flow. This conversion will allow us to focus a little more time on the rest of the 10,000 plants on site."

"Efren Quintana and his crew are responsible for the landscape and ornamental plants. That includes 1,636 trees, 3-1/2 miles of Oleander shrubs, 2-1/2 acres of flowerbeds, 7 acres of planters between the in-ground landscaping and the stadium, and the 115 plant-filled pots that highlight the concourse. Besides the standard pruning, edging, trimming, and cleanup, he orchestrates three seasonal color change

outs for all the plantings. And, because of the locations of those 115 pots on the stadium concourse, they require daily hand watering."

The ornamental turf areas are primarily turf-type tall fescues that require weekly mowing. Some Bermudagrass is infiltrating in the higher heat and most heavy-traffic areas. Since the turf textures and coloration are similar and the variation isn't noticeable to the general public, Waters plans to follow a general maintenance program that will encourage the turf best adapted to the specific site conditions to dominate in that area.

The extensive Rain Master irrigation system contains over 8,000 heads, 775 valves and 18 satellites. Waters says, "All of the irrigation is with reclaimed water. The water test for the month of January registered an SAR of 12.78. Using the effluent water is especially challenging on the sand-capped fields since the clay sub-surface, basically traps and holds the salts. The buildup generally reaches so high a



level in June or July that even attempting to neutralize it by putting out approximately 1-2 tons of gypsum per month throughout the year, the bicarbonates and chlorides in the water, eventually seal it off contributing to black layer."

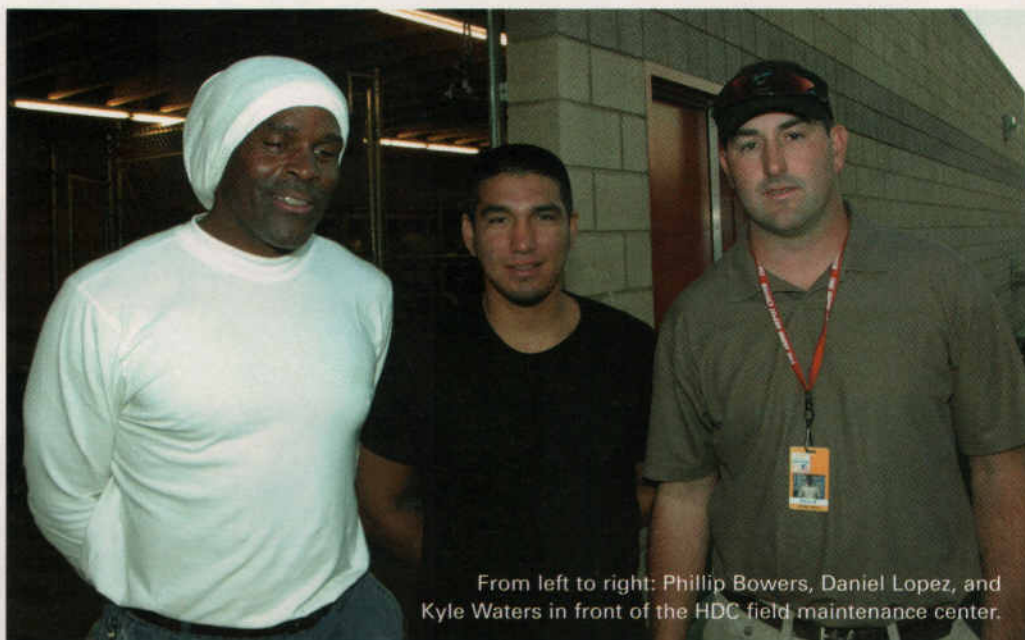
The stadium field is generally mowed four times a week during game weeks and five times a week in non-game weeks. Fertilization is based on soil and tissue test results. Floratine's 20-0-4, 3-0-28 and Protesyn are applied every 10 days. Granular fertilizer is applied twice a month on the ratio of 2 pounds of potassium to 1 pound nitrogen a month. Iron is applied to boost color once or twice a month depending on the game scheduling.

Mowing height of cut generally is maintained between 3/4 and 1 inch for all the fields. Waters has found this reduces the need to sweep up clippings or undertake thatch removal. Field painting is a constant process. One morning or afternoon is devoted to painting the stadium field for each game. Daily painting was required for the Charger practices. Phillip Bowers, Daniel Lopez and Kevin Lewis can paint up to 9 soccer fields in a day. Logos are added on the main stadium for certain events such as NCAA College Cup, USA Rugby 7's, and CIF high school football.

The busiest week

Waters and crew faced their busiest week to date this past summer. Waters says, "The JP Morgan Tennis Tournament drew record crowds and extensive TV coverage. Efren and Ben Garcia were in charge of all the flowers on the court. We also had a cycling event in the Velodrome, so they handled all the flowers for it too. This meant daily change outs, with everything watered at both venues, on the concourse and everything in place before activities began. We also needed to set up misters so spectators would stay cool. Ben handled all of that. The Chargers were on site for training. Kevin, Daniel, Manuel Vanda and Phillip took charge of the maintenance and painting requirements of the Chargers and their camp needs. Everyone on staff then, when time allowed, continued our daily maintenance of painting and mowing on the U.S. Soccer and Galaxy training fields. My main focus was on the load in for the X Games.

"We couldn't drive the semis to bring in the dirt for the X-games during crowd movement times or Charger practice times," says Waters. "And we couldn't load in



From left to right: Phillip Bowers, Daniel Lopez, and Kyle Waters in front of the HDC field maintenance center.

or out during the hours of the tennis tournament because of the noise factor for the players and fans. I worked with Brian Melekian, HDC Director of Operations, and Lee Zeidman, Senior VP of AEG Operations, to coordinate the timing between tennis matches and Charger practice times. Basically, we could only move dirt from 11pm until 6 AM."

Each of these events involved one or more of the facilities' major user groups. There was no way to prioritize: each of the groups was equally important and equally deserving of the top level, highest quality conditions. Attention to detail was essential.

Waters says, "Everyone on our staff stepped up to do whatever it took to deliver our best. There was so much involved at each venue, with so many different timing requirements. Everyone knew what needed to be done, whether it was coming in at 5:30 AM to water the plants on Center court or staying past dark to paint for the Chargers under the headlights of the Pro-Gators, they did it. I can't say enough about what a great job my staff did."

After the X Games

It took five days to bring in the 8,000 cubic yards of dirt and build the dirt road course for the X Games. The Super Moto course had them driving out of the stadium through the concourse, going outside the gate and then back into the parking lot and re-entering the stadium on the other side. Once the dirt was in place, the crews were on site for another six days. The X Games event was televised by both ESPN and ABC August 11-12th.

Waters says, "We needed to have the field in shape and ready for a Galaxy Soccer game set for August 1. Kurt Kitchens and his company JPD "Just Pushing Dirt" had the dirt removal calculated per truck so we could get it out and off site in 36 hours. Bill Barkshire was set to begin the laser leveling as soon as the dirt removal was completed and 255 irrigation heads were reset. We'd hoped to till the sand profile to relieve compaction and add more root zone material, but the tight timetable wouldn't allow it.

"During the setup and removal of the course, six of the irrigation valves had been broken. This set us back quite a bit. We had 255 heads to put in and were also switching out from Hunter to Rain Bird 5505 and 8005 heads. Neal Beeson of



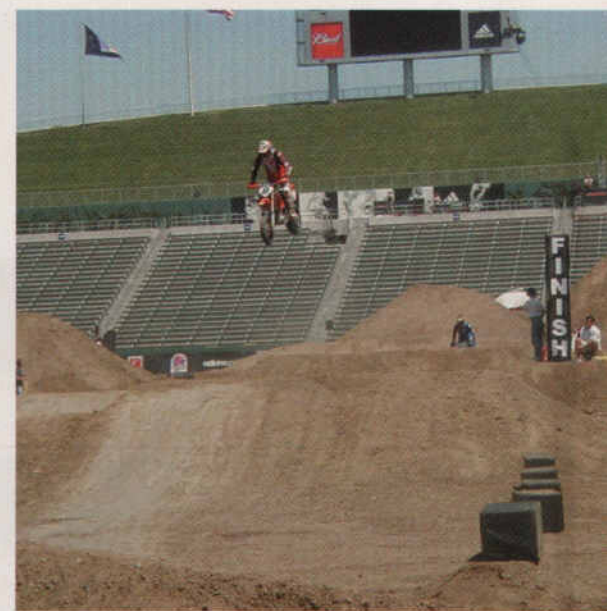
Pre-game introductions of competing teams for one of the College Cup games. Cameras are in place and rolling.

Sports Turf Facility Management and his crew, Matt Hart of Rain Bird, a couple of our crew members and I were all setting heads throughout the night to get the coverage correct. The laser leveling followed right behind us.

"Tom Stafford and his crew from West Coast Turf brought in 140,000 square feet of Bull's-eye Bermudagrass. We opted for big roll one piece sod cut 1-1/4 inches thick to get the stability for immediate play. As West Coast was rolling out the sod, we were sanding the seams right behind them, following that with hand watering and rolling. Because of the tight timing, we knew we had to accomplish a set amount per day to get it all down. The last 30,000 square feet of sod was laid on Friday afternoon and they played soccer as scheduled at 7 PM that Saturday. The Galaxy General Manager Doug Hamilton told us the field played great."

The Chevy commercial

At the end of August, the new turf was just recovering from being covered for five days for a Dave Matthews Band concert. HDC had just started using Terra floor. "Though the grass was stressed, it came out better than expected," Waters reports. "So we were ready for the next challenge, filming of the Chevy truck commercial with Howie Long. We put up goal posts and chalked the field as for NFL football. We couldn't paint lines because L.A. Galaxy had a soccer match later that weekend. They brought in the trucks, drivers, and camera crews and took over the field for three days to film that 30-second commercial. The trucks would rev up and spend from 20 to 40 minutes just moving back and forth in one spot until they had them all in place to start the action. And they did do what the commercial shows;



that's not a computer-generated shot.

"The actual field damage was less than we anticipated. There was actually more compaction damage from camera crews than from trucks. Phillip aerified in four directions with solid tines. We resodded around 12,000 square feet where tire marks skidded out and the trucks slid. Kevin then topdressed with dry sand and groomed it in. While we did apply a light touch of green paint strictly for aesthetics, playing conditions were excellent for the soccer game that took place three days after the filming."

The Home Depot Center hosted the NCAA Men's Soccer College Cup in November. The Rose Bowl teams practiced there in December. The Men's World Cup soccer team arrived on January 7 and has trained on the practice fields every day since then.

Rugby started in February with games on the stadium field from 10 in the morning to 6 at night for two straight days. Lacrosse takes over in March. Despite all the use, the field must be in top condition for the MLS season that starts in early April and runs to the MLS Cup in November. This will be the first year with two MLS teams sharing the stadium, the equivalent to the field sharing of the NFL Giants and Jets.

Weather adds more challenges. Waters says, "Rainfall from October through December doubled what we normally get for the total year. We'd overseeded the stadium field with a three-way perennial ryegrass blend in October. The seed was just coming up and we were about to mow when the rains hit. It rained and rained and we got zapped with Pythium in the rye and helminthosporium in the Bermudagrass. We treated, but had to start all over again with the overseeding process.

"Then we had a total of 17 inches of rain between December 1 and February 1. While we really appreciated the precipitation for the rest it gave our irrigation system and the great job it did of flushing out the salts, there were some negatives. The rains were so heavy at times they turned our walkways into rivers of water dumping onto the fields. We had 18 soccer games in 22 days in January. One of the most damaging elements was that was one of the doubleheaders on the stadium field was played during a 2-inch rain. Most of the running trail was so washed out it needed reworking. In one section, we added 275 tons of DG back on the trail so we could properly level it and smooth it out."

Waters calls overseeding with ryegrass his secret weapon. He says, "We do lots of aeration and broadcast seed so there's always some in place to germinate when conditions are right. We've used perennial and some intermediate ryegrass. Towards the end of the season we start putting out annual ryegrass on the multiuse fields that get so much traffic. We can put out twice as much seed for the same cost.

"Because all the fields are in use we're not able to scalp down turf height and adjust fertilization and irrigation to force transitioning out of the ryegrass. After rugby, we'll experiment by overseeding the main stadium with Kentucky bluegrass."

That pre-planning and solid preparation for whatever the future may bring is key to the program Waters and his crew have developed to insure the Home Depot Center is the sports showplace it was designed to be. **ST**

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