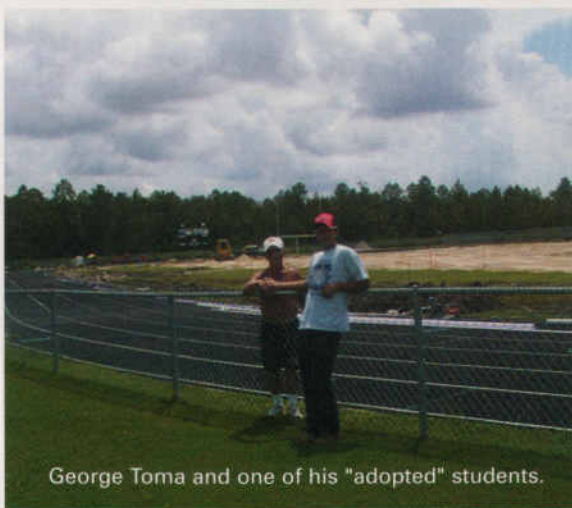


# High school hosts Super Bowl practices

BY RONNIE GRIFFIN

When Super Bowl XXXIV was awarded to Jacksonville, FL one of the issues was finding practice sites for the teams. The team hotel for the AFC champion was at the World Golf Village and the only fields within the required distance of the hotel were at local high schools. The NFL picked Bartram Trail High School because it is secluded, has nice facilities, and a Turfgrass Academy.

We currently have 47 students enrolled in Horticulture/Turfgrass classes. The first year in the Academy students must take Agriscience and we have more than 100 students currently in that class. In these classes, we train students for careers in Landscape, Golf Course, and Sports Turf Management. We spend about



George Toma and one of his "adopted" students.

1/3 of the time in the classroom and 2/3 of the time outside for hands-on learning. One of our students spent summer 2004 as an intern for the Jacksonville Suns, the local double A baseball team. Several students work at local golf courses and lawn maintenance companies. Some of these students are planning to further their education at either Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College or Lake City Community College.

This fall we hosted a workshop for the newly formed North Florida Sports Turf Managers Association chapter. Many students were involved and are now members of STMA.

Our fields were good by high school standards, some of the best in the area. Minor problems included poor drainage, irrigation, and soil. So to make the field playable for the NFL renovations had to be made, and

the work began last July. The sod was removed and the soil taken out about 2 feet down. Some of the material taken out was used as a base for a 70-yard practice field near our game field, since two fields were needed. Then drainage was installed around the track and sideline, and a mix of 90% sand and 10% peat was installed.

It was about this time that Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne paid us a visit. We were lucky to have had only minimal damage. The project was delayed but it gave the students an opportunity to work on the renovations. Students helped rake and had to blow off the track several times because of sand being blown by the storms. Since the old field only had about a 6-inch crown in the center it was decided the new field should have a 12-inch crown. The sod was Tifton 419 Bermudagrass and cut 2 inches thick.

The installation was finished on a Tuesday and we played our first game on Friday night. We rescheduled our first 3 games of the season because of the delays but it was worth the wait. Some of the Turfgrass students are football players so getting to play on the beautiful new field was especially exciting for them.

During the renovations we had a special guest on our campus. George Toma visited to oversee the renovations. What a treat. At first many of the students didn't know who he is but they soon found out! They learned of his experiences with the Kansas City Chiefs and Royals and all of the Super Bowls and Pro Bowls. George took the time to speak to the students about turf and their work ethic. Students quickly learned about giving their best effort "and then some." Working side by side with George prompted some students to help out on the field over weekends. The students found it funny that whenever he needed something George would call out "hey son." They were all like his adopted children. We appreciated the opportunity to work with a legend.

Ed Mangan of the Atlanta Braves and the NFL also visited several times. We also had help from Ed Attalla and Bob Norman of the Jacksonville Suns. They came out several times and helped us line our field and paint the logos. Students also assisted with overseeding the fields.

The challenge then was maintaining the fields. We played soccer on them until the start of the year. Students mowed the field with new mowers provided by Toro and the NFL. We are proud to be the only high school chosen as a Super Bowl practice site. The students and faculty at Bartram Trail will always remember what a wonderful experience this has been. **ST**

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