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around the grounds

A labor of love

BY **BOB HUELSMAN**

As the hot, humid days of summer arrive in the Midwest, thoughts in Covington, a small, rural west-central town in Ohio, turn to the upcoming football season. Football in Covington has a rich history and a tradition that can be summed up by a former player who said: "Football is king and it will always be king."

Thirty years ago, as athletic director and assistant football coach, I searched for a simpler way to line the field rather than the standard crushed limestone routine. A neighboring school district had a handyman who had developed a homemade paint liner mechanism. We had him come over and line the field with paint one evening, and "a labor of love" was born.

We started with stenciled numbers, crawling around on our hands and knees, painting by hand while also slapping the mosquitoes that came out in droves under the lights.

We bought a paint liner and upgraded our paint quality and for many years we worked with this solitary unit. How we got by with only one is still a mystery. It never really broke down where it caused us to miss lining for a game, a fact of dependability that in this day you don't come to expect. And, when you have but one liner, you never really need a lot of people. One or two others besides myself were sufficient.

Over the years, we progressed to four liners, maintenance men to keep them running, human paint mixers, people to push the liners, people to spray the paint, a community and booster organization (the Bucc Boosters) that came out to help (similar to the mosquitoes that greeted us that very first time). We have a field that takes a back-seat to none.

Covington High School's Smith Field won the first Field of Excellence Award, a national award sponsored by Pioneer Manufacturing in Cleveland, the field marking paint specialist.

Beyond the obvious yard lines, hash marks, two-color yard line numerals and end zone letters that spell out BUCCS (26 feet high), the wishbone "C" and Buccaneer head logo that grace the 50 yard line is the centerpiece of the field. An impressive 50 feet high, spanning 20 yards between the 40s, the Buccaneer head is laid out by hand every year and has become the identity of Covington's Smith Field and a point of community pride.

To have a good "painting," you need a good canvas. We feel a good grass surface is important to the overall impact. Mercer Group, Inc. from Troy, OH has worked with us for more than a decade to maintain a healthy, thick, natural grass surface. More than one opponent has been known to kneel and feel the luxurious surface of Smith Field as they step foot on it for the first time...as have Covington seniors, in bidding a proud farewell after playing on it for their last time.

As the buzzards return like clockwork to Hinkley, Ohio, and locusts start their annual drone in August, the men of Covington find their way to Smith Field to begin the ritual of painting for another football campaign.

And as the lights come on Friday nights and the Covington faithful arrive and leave with pride and satisfaction, appreciating the ambiance and atmosphere of a facility that, win or lose, bespeaks the tradition of something more than just high school football. **ST**

Bob Huelsman is a retired administrator for Covington High School, Covington, OH. For more information about Pioneer Manufacturing's Fields of Excellence Award program, see www.pioneer-mfg.com

