

No brown grass for Browns

BY JERRY ROCHE

"The main reasons for brown grass are adverse weather conditions, excessive wear and improper maintenance," said Joe Rimelspach, extension turfgrass pathologist at The Ohio State University.

During the Ohio Sports Turf Managers Association's 2005 field day and workshop in Cleveland June 28, Rimelspach told about 85 attendees that one of the best solutions for brown grass is to "incorporate genetically improved turfgrass"—which might include genetically engineered cultivars in the future. "They are great management tools," he said.

"What are expectations, yours and your client's, for the field, and what are the economics?" Rimelspach asked. "People who have to spend their money creatively are the best turf managers."

The meeting began and ended at Browns Stadium in downtown Cleveland, with a midday pit stop at the team's practice facility in Berea, a suburb southwest of the city.

During the morning session, held in a massive orange-and-brown game-day locker room, Rutgers University Director of Turfgrass Breeding Dr. William Meyer gave a speech titled "Cool-Season Turfgrass Selection and New Turfgrass Technology."

Chris Powell, Browns' head sports-turf manager, conducted on-site field tours at both sites.

Though the Browns restructured their front office and roster during the off-season, the team's playing fields are among the best. The 5-year-old turf at Browns Stadium was voted top bluegrass field in the North, Powell said, and the Berea fields have been voted the best practice fields in the entire NFL.

Yet Powell's life is not without complication.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm the captain of a sinking ship," he noted, "and I'm just trying to get the ship to the end of the season." His staff of six full-timers must split time between the stadium and the four practice fields in Berea, depending on the team's practice and NFL regular-season schedules. On occasion, the grounds crew is even called upon to scrub and disinfect the team's 60-yard indoor synthetic field.

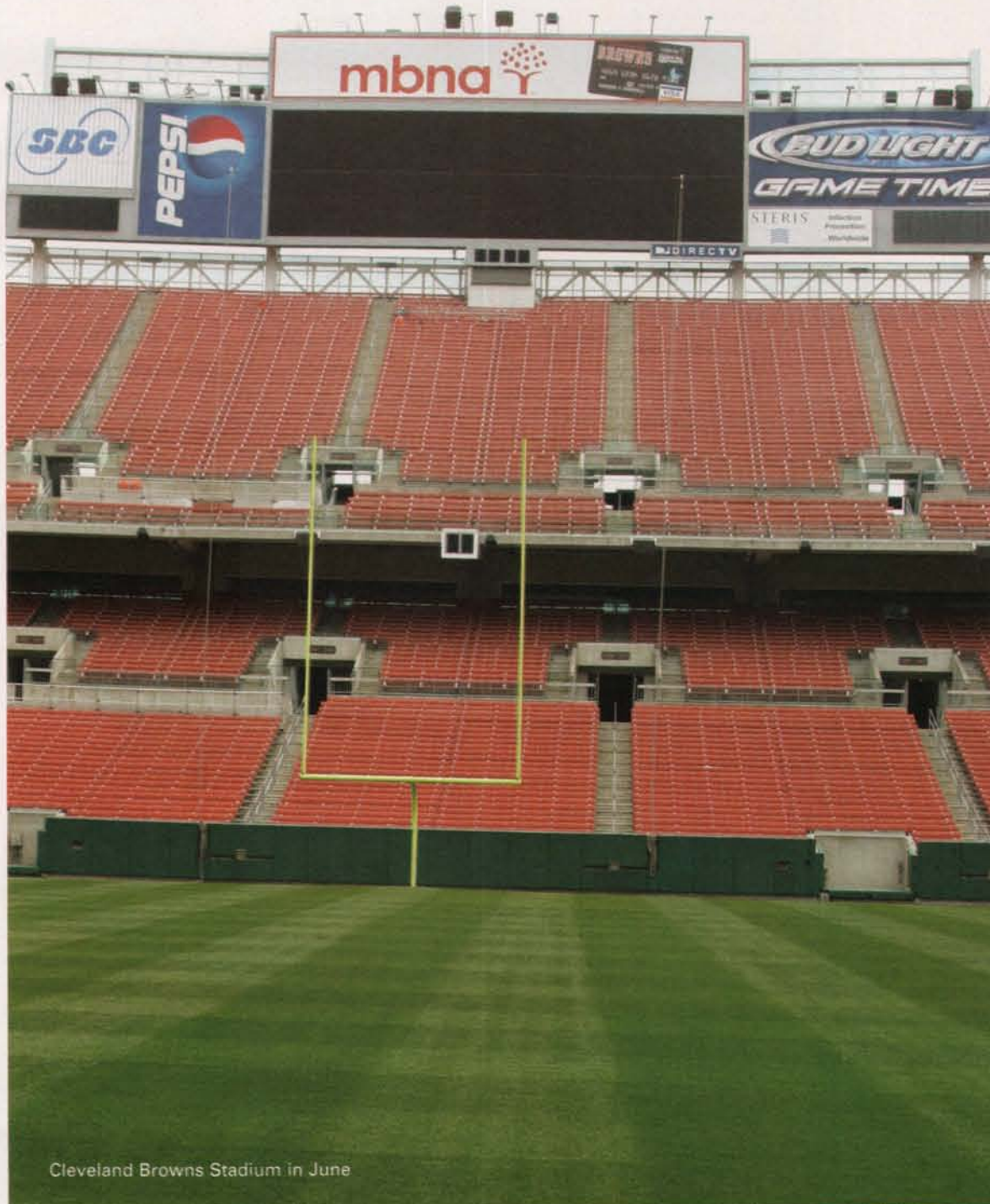
Forty-one miles of underground pipes and a glycol pump help keep Browns Stadium field warm in colder weather. The heating system, which features an array of temperature sensors at depths of 5 and 7 inches, also extends the growing season. And when the field begins to wear down from the regu-

lar-season grind, Powell and his staff "will pound the middle once a week with ryegrass seeded at 10 lb. per 1,000 square feet."

OSTMA President Brian Gimbel said attendance met expectations, even though the organization was

without an executive secretary for the three weeks leading up to the field day.

Jerry Roche is editor of Landscape & Irrigation and a veteran turf writer.



Cleveland Browns Stadium in June