



Super Bowl XLI turf was MVP

By Eric Schroder

It may be akin to “preaching to the choir” but we here at *SportsTurf* would be remiss if we didn’t recognize and publicize the great job Ed Mangan, George Toma, Alan Sigwardt, and their crew did in handling the turf for this year’s Super Bowl in Miami.

Not only did these turf professionals have to deal with the “normal” Super Bowl, a.k.a. “The Biggest Game in the World” (apologies to World

Cup fans but this IS the USA we’re talkin’ about!), routine – hours and hours on the field of rehearsal time for pre-game and halftime festivities, but did you notice that steady rain throughout the game?

Luckily the players’ skills weren’t at all diminished by the conditions [insert joke here about “What skills?” when referring to Chicago QB Rex Grossman]. “About as bad of weather as you could throw the ball in,” Indianapolis quarterback Peyton Manning was quoted as say-

Photo courtesy of Dolphin Stadium.

ing afterward. And, "I was thinking, 'Has there ever been more rain in any game I've been in?'" from Indianapolis coach Tony Dungy. Did anyone see one splash, one slip, one divot, anything at all about the playing surface that affected any action in the Big Game? Right, neither did we.

And that's the point. Most Americans and millions of other earthlings watched a football game, played in a Florida downpour, and 99% of them didn't realize the field was perfect. It didn't enter their minds and **THAT'S HOW IT SHOULD BE.**

Meanwhile, you readers of this magazine were probably the only ones bragging to your fellow Super Bowl partygoers, "Look at that field!" What could have been a better advertisement for the wonders of natural grass?

"We put more water on the field the day before the game than fell on it during the game," NFL Field Director Mangan told us. "You have to keep these sand-based fields moist or they will fall apart on you."

"All the Super Bowls (he's done 17 now) are challenging in one way or the other; this is the first one where we've had rain on game day, but you have to prepare for the worst and hopefully get the best," said Mangan.

"The PAT system (Prescription Athletic Turf, can drain up to 3 in. of rainfall per hour) provides such great drainage, combined with some great turf on top of it, grown in a sand profile that perks real well,

well, we had a great field," Mangan said. "And that bermudagrass can hold a lot of water."

As for the indefatigable, 78-year-old Toma, who's been involved in prepping the turf for all 41 Super Bowls, he called the sod for #41 "The second greatest sod I've ever seen. After 48 hours of rehearsals, the only thing that was going to hurt that grass was fire," he told us.

Toma credited sod farmer "Eddie Boy" Woerner from Southern Turf Nurseries with growing the "Super" sod. He said Woerner's turf is grown on a sheet of plastic and will hold up under any conditions and in any part of the country. The turf was trucked in from farms in nearby Indiantown, FL and Tifton, GA and put down in 7-foot wide, 41-foot long strips, said Toma, and the whole field was done in 6 hours.

Toma told us the greatest sod he's ever seen was a paspalum variety Woerner grew on plastic for a 1999 game in the Superdome.

Boyd Montgomery, CSFM, sports fields district sales manager for Toro, who provided equipment for this year's field preparation, said, "The Super Bowl field was a testament to the fact that properly maintained natural turf can withstand the extreme conditions of practice, play, and weather. The sod used on the playing surface had an outstanding structure and thickness that provided the athletes with the footing and traction needed to perform at the highest level. The quality of the playing surface that Ed, George, and the turf crew provided was the true winner of this year's Super Bowl." ■

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