

Turf intern caught in "Civil War"

By Jonathan Garrett



One of the oldest rivalries in college football is "The Civil War" between the University of Oregon Ducks and the Oregon State University Beavers; the 2007 meeting was the 111th (Oregon State won 38-31 in double overtime). If you live in Oregon it is a requirement that you choose a rooting interest in one team or the other. Either you're a Beaver or a Duck. The towns of Corvallis and Eugene are relatively close, so the tensions are always high when the gridiron match-up comes around each fall.

As a horticulture undergraduate at Oregon State, I took a summer internship with the University of Oregon grounds crew. This decision wasn't easy to make. Despite some hard times and inner turmoil however, it turned out to be one of the best jobs I've ever had. I learned many things about the turf industry; I worked for a great boss who showed me how to be a good manager; learned some tricks of the trade from a veteran crew; learned how to be a better employee; and how to get the most out of my internship. Most importantly, I learned that it's not the destination it's the journey (the

dirty, wet, grass-stained journey).

I chose to be a Beaver during my senior year of high school since I thought Oregon State had the best turfgrass program in the area. The program is headed by well-known professor Tom Cook. It wasn't until I got into the program that I decided to narrow my career focus more toward sports fields. With that decision in mind I joined the STMA as a student member in 2004 though I didn't attend my first Conference until last year in San Antonio. In a hotel lobby there I saw a man wearing an Oregon Ducks shirt talking to a friend of mine who had gone through the

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program at Oregon State. He turned out to be Eric Fasbender, CSFM, the grounds manager Oregon. I was introduced and that was when the dialogue started about a possible internship at the U of O. I was very hesitant at first, because of my innate dislike for any association with the Ducks.

Later at the Conference I attended a seminar and there was Eric again, who was presenting on how to portray professionalism in the turf industry. I was very impressed by his presentation, especially the professionalism he portrayed while presenting it! Throughout the week I ran into Eric quite a few more times. It was as if fate were trying to tell me something. Eventually, I got his business card and we talked more seriously about the internship. My measure of dislike for anything yellow and green was lessening, but still not gone.

Hearing it from the Beavers

Later, at a meeting of the OSU turf club, we were discussing where

everyone was headed that summer for their internships. When I mentioned the possibility of working at University of Oregon, the club's response was a host of jeers, complaints, and dirty looks. This worried me about my choice. I asked Professor Cook his opinion and he said, "You know they grow Kentucky bluegrass down there, right?" I replied that I knew and that it interested me. He went on to say that if I could live with working at U of O then he thought it would be a good experience. So I contacted Eric and let him know that I would like to work for him, if he still wanted to hire a Beaver.

Life of an intern

I wanted to work hard and show that I was competent with the tasks that I had been given. I thought that to be a good intern I should take as much work off the manager's hands as possible. I also knew part of having a good internship means learning anything you can from anyone possible. But after a few weeks my understanding of a quality



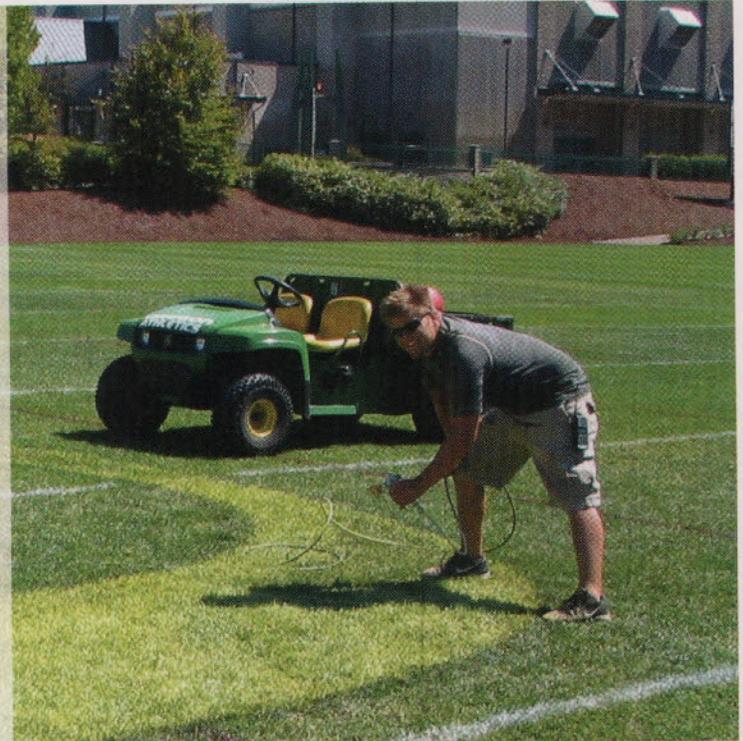
Bluegrass in Oregon

During my visit to Eugene before my internship, I noticed that some fields were covered with tarps. I later discovered they were growth blankets, which are needed to grow Kentucky bluegrass in the Willamette Valley of Oregon.

Kentucky bluegrass does not generally grow well here. It stays dormant a long time and is more prone to diseases due to the low light levels in the fall winter and spring. These factors cause headaches for most grounds managers in the region. To keep the turf healthy and ready for play, it needs help from the blankets to keep the soil temperatures warm enough in the early spring to bring it out of dormancy. The benefits of using Kentucky bluegrass is that it forms a mat layer which assists in structuring a sturdy playing surface, even in areas of heavy wear. The traditional grass grown on most fields in the area is perennial rye, which does not form that thick mat layer, resulting in areas with large divots and no plant material.

As I learned all this, I realized the reason for Tom's concern towards my working with Kentucky bluegrass. As the weather got warmer, there did not seem to be any problems with the fields related to dormancy as a result of the growth blankets. The fields ended up looking great and playing even better.

— Jonathan Garrett



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internship began to change. I learned that it's the quality of the work, not necessarily quantity of the work that is important in an internship. Interns should want to learn the "why" of what they are doing, not just that it needs to be done.

On my first turf internship I was advised to, "learn more what not to do, than what to do." Luckily for me, my job at Oregon did not provide me with an overwhelming amount of opportunities to learn from mistakes. Rather, I learned largely from the responsibilities given me. I am glad that Eric was able to assess my abilities and give me tasks that I could handle, setting me up to succeed.

One of my favorite times was when Eric would take me out to lunch. It was a great time for me to talk to him about things going on at work and how he would handle certain situations. Another great opportunity for these conversations was toward the end of the day when the crew had a few minutes to spare.

As far as the maintenance aspects went, it could be pretty routine. Working on the athletic fields with assistant groundskeeper Steve "Dino" DiNatale, I was doing a lot of mowing, edging, raking, and painting of lines and logos. I enjoyed each time I got practice on the painter, and savored every moment in the seat of the mower.

The other great part of the internship was working on the landscaping with the other assistant groundskeeper, Kenny Hoffman. Interesting stories follow Kenny around, whether it's cutting down

trees, digging 2-foot deep trenches with a mattock and shovel, or dealing with 25-foot quick coupler geysers, along with other irrigation troubles.

Lessons learned

One important thing I was exposed to was the administrative side of grounds management. If Eric was doing something in his office he was more than willing to let me step in and see what he was doing. Scheduling staff, double-checking invoices, and e-mailing coaches the weather forecasts for their up-coming games were some of the things I had not thought about before. Learning this side of the job was very interesting to me, and helped me get a better understanding of what all it entails to be a manager.

I was exposed to a large range of athletic field management. Eric and his crew maintain multiple kinds of turf, such as the grass football practice fields, the synthetic game field, the grass soccer field that is shared with the lacrosse team, the softball field, putting green, and track infield that was being renovated. And I was also exposed to what it's like to be a lone Beaver in a flock of Ducks. ■

Jonathan Garrett is back in Beaverland at Oregon State and is a student member of the Sports Turf Managers Association.

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