



Rich Genoff, San Francisco 49ers

GENOFF HAS DREAM JOB ON WEST COAST

By Tim Londergan

Sprinting toward the end zone, San Francisco 49ers running back Frank Gore has run this play a hundred times before and it shows. Following his lead blocker, Gore dives across the goal line for six. The stadium erupts in cheers as he celebrates in his grass-stained uniform. San Francisco 49ers fans can't get enough of plays like these.

Among them is Rich Genoff, sports turf manager and head groundskeeper at the Marie P. DeBartolo Sports Centre, the 49ers training facility. A Bay Area native, Genoff knows the weeks of hard work that go into every touchdown because every practice snap occurs on his fields.

"Growing up, I would have never imagined having the opportunity not only to do something I love, but for the team I've followed since I was a kid," says Genoff, who

previously served as groundskeeper for near by Santa Clara University. "When I got the offer to care for the fields, I was on top of the world."

A 30-year veteran of the sports turf industry, Genoff joined the San Francisco 49ers organization in March 1988. Hired by John McVay, former director of football operations/vice president, and legendary head coach Bill Walsh, Genoff was the first person to maintain the new facility.

"When I came onboard, the facility was still under construction," says Genoff. "My first job was to go out and buy all the maintenance equipment that we were going to need for the fields and grounds."

Also home to the 49ers headquarters, the Centre is situated on 11 acres in Santa Clara, Calif., less than an hour south of Monster Park. "We have a total of three practice fields: two are Tifway 2 hybrid

bermuda and the third is Sportex synthetic Infill," says Genoff.

"By the end of the season, the practice fields are pretty worn out, and our goal is to have them perfect by the time the team arrives for camp." He continues, "It's that cycle nurturing the turf, watching them tear it up during practice, and then reviving it from that damage that really is one of my favorite things."

To reduce overworking the turf, Genoff works closely with the coaching staff to rotate practice fields on a weekly basis, using the Sportex field on Fridays to provide an additional day of rest for the Tifway 2 turf. In addition to field rotation, he incorporates a number of cultural practices including aerification, verticutting and rolling to ensure turf health.

Mowing at a height of 1 inch, Genoff and his crew perform deep tine aerification three

times a year using 10 inch tines. Additionally, they will verticut and dethatch the fields every few months. "Dethatching is crucial to avoid thatch build up throughout the year from heavy use."

As the fields are hybrid bermudagrass, they do not require a rigorous fertility program. However, Genoff will apply a granular 6-20-20 mixture at the beginning of the year and an IBDU 42-0-0 mixture and ammonium sulfate throughout the season as necessary.

He has also incorporated an insect program with a focus on grubs, which could leave the turf susceptible to weak root systems. "Typically, we treat for grubs at the end of June, first week of July," says Genoff. "We use either Merit or Sevin insecticide at the appropriate acre rate, depending on severity of infestation and when it's identified."

In addition to contending with wear and tear from heavy use and the occasional pest, weeds are one of the biggest challenges.

"They're a nuisance, always have been, always will be," says Genoff. "When the fields were first installed, we had cool-season grasses but there wasn't a product that would take the weeds out and leave the desired turf. I lost my field to weeds and there was nothing I could do to stop it," he recalls.

In 1993, Genoff replaced the cool-season grass with Tifway 2. "That changed everything. I didn't have to just acknowledge that the turf was infested with undesirable weeds like *Poa annua*, I could do something to make sure I was providing the team with the best quality turf."

With its shallow root system, prolific seed distribution and poor drought tolerance, *poa annua* wreaks havoc on athletic turf. "Luckily, we found a product that effectively takes cool-season grasses like that out of warm-season grasses, like bermudagrass without damaging the turf," says Genoff.

"I apply the postemergent (Revolver) herbicide as a broadcast, foliar spray, as

necessary at the rate of 17.4 oz. per acre. It usually takes me about two quarts to cover the entire area."

Genoff continues, "Revolver gets rid of *Poa annua*, and leaves the Tifway 2 to grow in and establish strong roots. The coaches are happy because the team is practicing on the best possible field conditions, and I feel good because they've come to expect the highest quality."

Last year Genoff's efforts were recognized by the Sports Turf Management Association, when the Marie P. DeBartolo Sports Centre's natural grass fields were named the 2006 STMA Professional Football Field of the Year. "It's a great honor to be recognized by the STMA and my peers with this award," he says. ■

Tim Londergan is an account executive with Tierney Communications in Philadelphia, PA.

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