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Soccer-specific stadium is no bull

Fields and stadiums built specifically for soccer have been opening at a faster rate every year since the first one in the US, Columbus Crew Stadium in Ohio, opened 11 years ago last month. These stadiums typically have what you would expect from American facilities—scoreboards, video screens, luxury suites and increasingly, roofs that cover every fan's seat. The latest to open was Red Bull Arena in Harrison, NJ; we asked assistant groundskeeper Neal Sitzman for a report:

"The stadium was completed in March 2010 and holds 25,000 fans. The field has a state of the art irrigation and drainage system underneath the 90% sand, 10% peat rootzone," he said. "It has a SubAir unit used for blowing hot or cool air, and for pulling water through the profile. The blower system works well to move water off the rain tarps as well.

"Eight sensors are located throughout the field to relay information about temperature, moisture, amount of salt, and oxygen levels in the rootzone. (See page 22 for a story on Red Bull's soil profile.) The Kentucky bluegrass sod, from Tuckahoe Farms, was grown on soil similar to the rootzone mix," Sitzman said. "Part of the stadium roof is made out of Teflon-coated fiberglass designed to allow some light through, while protecting the fans from inclement weather.

"As of the middle of May, the area south of the 6-yard box has seen only light that passed through the roof. With the roof on all sides of the stadium, the field gets slightly more than 4 hours of sunlight a day [in mid-May]. We do have air movement over the field from the four tunnels under the stands and through the concourse.

"We laid the 1/2-inch sod last October 15, then put on growth blankets and turned on the heat in mid-January and kept it on until March, as the scheduled grand opening was March 13," Sitzman said. "The desired root growth happened on the north half of the field that saw sunlight, but from south of midfield, rooting diminished and the sod was less established. At the end of February the decision was made to resod the south half of the field; on March 1, after 20 inches of snow was removed from that half, the existing sod was stripped out and March 4-5 1 1/2-inch thick cut sod was installed.

"On March 8 we solid-tined the entire field with 3/8-inch tines, seeded with Kentucky bluegrass, and topdressed with 50 tons of sand," Sitzman said.

Five inches of rain forced postponement of the Grand Opening until March 20, when the MLS Red Bull New York hosted Brazil's Santos FC. Sitzman reported that the south half of the field was core aerified and swept March 28 and April 1 the north half received a DryJect treatment that included 25 tons of topdressing. On April 29 the field was seeded with perennial ryegrass at 5 lbs./1,000 sq. ft. and another 25 tons of topdressing added.

P.S. We published a draft version last month of irrigation system designer Michael Prevost's article, "Alternate water supplies for sports turf irrigation" (p. 34). Our apologies to Michael; his website is www.designpsi.com. You can see the correct version on www.sportsturfonline.com.

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