



Red Bull Arena



BMO Field

Turf report from the new Major League Soccer stadiums

TODAY'S NEWEST SOCCER-SPECIFIC PROFESSIONAL stadiums can create new challenges in turf management. We asked a few Major League Soccer stadium managers how it's going.

DAN SHEMESH,
Red Bull Arena, Harrison, NJ

SportsTurf: What type of turfgrass are you managing?

Shemesh: Our field at Red Bull Arena is Kentucky Bluegrass overseeded with perennial ryegrass.

ST: What tips do you have for keeping a good stand of grass despite all the traffic these new stadiums see with all the corporate and special events?

Shemesh: Tips for keeping a good stand of turf despite traffic with extra events: We like to aerate and deep-tine as often as the schedule allows us to. We also overseed when the events are close together and do not anticipate enough recovery time. In the cooler months we use growth covers to accelerate the seed germination. Careful planning of extra non-sporting events with built-in rain dates and restrictions on what can be done on field helps minimize damage.

ST: What's been your biggest challenge this season and how did you respond?

Shemesh: Our biggest challenge this season will be the last two weeks of July where we host six games along with six training sessions. Hopefully the weather cooperates and by the time I am reading this issue of STMA the field is still in good shape.

ROBERT HEGGIE,
BMO Field & KIA Training Grounds, Toronto

SportsTurf: What type of turfgrass are you managing?

Heggie: BMO Field was converted from artificial to Kentucky Bluegrass 2.5 years ago. I overseed with a blend of 15% Kentucky Bluegrass and 85% Perennial Ryegrass, but a few times a year I will overseed 100% Kentucky Bluegrass.

ST: What tips do you have for keeping a good stand of grass despite all the traffic these new stadiums see with all the corporate and special events?

Heggie: Obviously the key to keeping a good stand of grass is a multifaceted answer. First of all, rotation of play is vital, keeping in contact with the coaches and ensuring they are rotating around the field and not using the same areas over and over. Limiting field usage (no 18-yard box) during smaller events can at least ensure that the 18-yard boxes are in prime condition for games. If you have enough room, moving the pitch a few yards to the left or right. This changes the wear pattern since most of MLS soccer plays down the middle of the field, it also moves where the goalkeeper is standing.

Fertility is key! I personally in 2.5 years have never had to use any sort of pesticide. I am sure that it is due to the proper fertility in my plants, as well as controlling the environment as much as I can. BMO Field has a SubAir system and a hydronic heat system, so some environmental control is possible. A combination a granular, liquid and foliar fertilizers are the best route for a healthy stand of grass.

I am also a big believer in the use of silicon products, they help make the plant more turgid and resilient against wear. No one can look at a plant and know exactly what it needs. Soil and tissue test are vital to ensure that you are following the proper fertility program, there is no one program that everyone can follow, and your program should forever be changing. Try not to nitrogen load, the plant will take up as much

nitrogen as you want to let it, but it doesn't mean that it needs it. I compare nitrogen with plants like a fat kid with sugar. They'll eat and eat and eat, to the point of being full, leaving no room for essential minerals and nutrients to be consumed.

Another key component is proper grass selection when overseeding. The blend I use is 15% KBG and 85% PRG. But it's the species selection that is so important. For Kentucky Bluegrass I use "Jumpstart" a newer variety of blue that has a drastically shorter germination time. Personally I see in germinating in 5 days, far superior to the traditional blues.

For my Perennial Ryegrass selection I use Regenerative Perennial Ryegrass, again a new variety. The benefit to this is that it doesn't have the traditional growth habit of rye, its growth characteristics are actually closer to bluegrasses (stolens). Clearly a plant that grows by stolens is superior since when divots are taken there is a greater chance of advantageous nodes still being present.

Proper watering! The drier you can have the pitch, the less damage it is going to take and the less compaction the soil is going to face as well.

Make sure to aerate as much as possible. It can be very difficult to aerate due to the busy schedules and overuse, but when there is time, make sure you get out there! It's so key to promote gas exchange and proper water and fertility movement. Aeration is a one step backwards, two steps forwards procedure. Low oxygen levels and high moisture levels are a key for many pests and disease, so ensure that aeration is done as much as possible.

ST: What's been your biggest challenge this season and how did you respond?

Heggie: Biggest challenge in Toronto this year was a lack of rainfall and incredible high heat. We saw many days over 100 degrees, and it has only rained here around 5 times since May (as late August). Keeping Bluegrass and Ryegrass alive and aggressive in the heat is not an easy task. Light syringings on hot days is obviously a key to fighting this problem. [I benefit from] using the SubAir system and pressure at night, pushing cooler night time air into the soil profile and reducing its temperature. Furthermore, my irrigation water is high in bicarbonates, this creates a problem in the soil over time, tying up nutrients. So I have had to use a lot more organic acid this year than I have in the past, but this helps acidify the soil leaving nutrients available. If I know the rain is coming then I don't bother with the acid, since the pH of the rain does the same job in my opinion and it's an application I can use later. ■