



Setting up for a “Big League” weekend in the Alamodome

Since its completion in 1993, the Alamodome in San Antonio has hosted many events. From NBA basketball to boxing, Final Fours to football, ice shows to trade shows, monster trucks to bull riding; its versatility has made it an easy choice for events both large and small. So when officials from Ryan-Sanders Baseball, a group founded in part by Hall of Fame pitcher Nolan Ryan, approached the Alamodome about hosting professional baseball, it was an opportunity to do something that never had been done inside the facility.

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One of the first questions many wondered was why the Alamodome? “With our two teams in Central and South Texas (Round Rock Express and Corpus Christi Hooks), and the Ryan’s Ranch near San Antonio, they (the Ryan’s) had driven past the Alamodome many times and wondered about the possibility of baseball,” explained JJ Gottsch of Ryan-Sanders Baseball. “It was never the right time or the right opportunity never presented itself before, and then when Nolan became CEO of the Rangers, it became a possibility. The opportunity for the Rangers to extend their brand in San Antonio, and the chance to do something really special and unique, led us to the event.”

Playing a baseball game in a facility not specifically designed for baseball presented many challenges. Essentially everything had to start from scratch, from the playing field, to walls, bullpens and nets, batting cages and screens, none of which were available in the Alamodome. According to Gottsch, “We created a great team with Dome staff, MLB and Ryan-Sanders Baseball to get it done.”

The first hurdle was what to do for the playing field. Early ideas were to go with a grass field. However, when it became apparent that it would be labor intensive with

no guarantee on how long it would hold up or for how many games, officials looked at other options, including the possibility of purchasing the original turf field from the Sky Dome in Toronto. But in the end the decision was made to use 133,000 square feet of custom turf from AstroTurf.

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The field installed was an AstroTurf GameDay Grass 3D52 Diamond synthetic turf system, a third generation artificial playing surface. Once the turf was selected, a decision needed to be made on whether the turf would be laid on a pad, dirt, or the concrete floor alone, and how the dirt areas would be handled. With the help of Murray Cook, former president of the Sports Turf Managers Association and a MLB consultant, the decision was made to put a 3-4 inch thick dirt sub-base under the infield area and feather it down to the floor in the foul areas and starting beyond the 95-foot arc to the outfield.

Doing a one-of-a-kind install like this would be difficult under normal circumstances, but making this one even more complicated was the Alamodome’s busy schedule. In addition to getting ready for this event, the Dome already had other events on the schedule; two home games for the San Antonio Talons of the Arena Football League, a 2-day running event, and a pay per view Total Nonstop Action wrestling event. Coordination among all the parties was key; if this was going to succeed, we all had to be on the same page.

Kevin Swank with Texas-based AstroBuilders handled the install of the turf. When the turf was delivered, his team began the process of cutting it and piecing it together to conform to the Dome floor and seating configuration.



Once that was done, the turf in the north half of the building was rolled up and moved south and stored so stadium staff could install the arena for the Talons home game. This also required the turf on the south side to be partially rolled up so seating could be moved.

As soon as the AFL game was over, that field was removed and seating moved back, and the installation of the dirt sub base began. Garrett Reddehase, field superintendent for the Round Rock Express, and his staff handled this portion of the project. Once home plate was set, wood frames for home plate, the pitchers mound and each of the three base pits were constructed and placed. Then, approximately 300 cubic yards of dirt was brought in to provide the base that the turf would be laid on. Reddehase and staff then laser graded everything, and once it was completed, the turf was laid back in place and finally preparation of the turf began. Total installation of the turf took 8 days, which is about one-third of the time a standard project takes.

Upon completion of the turf, the crew from Round Rock began finally prep of the base pits, home plate and the pitchers mound. Bullpen mounds were constructed in the tunnels leading from the loading docks to the stadium floor. Crews began hanging wall pads on the seating and temporary fencing was placed in the corners and from behind home plate down the 3rd base line to form one of the dugouts. Once the games were complete, the turf was rolled up and hauled off to a storage facility down the street from the Dome, along with the wall pads, fencing and other items used for the event, to be used for future games.

More than 75,000 people attended the 2-day event that saw the Texas Rangers take on the San Diego Padres. Overall the response to the event was good from the both players and fans. Recently, a 2-year agreement was signed that will bring Big League Weekend back to the Alamodome. In 2014, the Texas Rangers will take on the Houston Astros for two games. As with anything, some changes will be made to enhance the experience for players and fans. The bullpens will be moved out onto the field so fans can see them. Lighting will be added in the corners to help brighten up these areas up (Alamodome lighting is configured for football not baseball). In addition, home plate will be moved a few feet to make the viewing experience better for all fans. Officials for both the Alamodome and Ryan-Sanders Baseball hope that this event will be something that they can grow and continue to do for many years to come. ■

Thomas McAfee is the Facilities Operations Coordinator, Convention & Sports Facilities Department, for the City of San Antonio.