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POISON. DO YOU WANT IT TO
LOOK GOOD YEAR-ROUND? OR DO
YOU WANT IT TO LOOK GREAT
DURING THE SEASON?
I'M A VERY SEASONAL GUY."**

to hold that rye until we're done with our big spring practice game in mid-April and the baseball season is over, which is usually the middle of June."

With that much rye Kris knows he's shading out his TifSport, holding it back. So when he sprays out his rye, he's got maybe 2% TifSport coverage. Maybe. "The hardest thing I have to deal with is impatience. A lot of guys can't do this because their coaches go ballistic. Mine do, too. Every year, for a month or two. That's OK with me. I just smile. I know everybody wants it to look good all the time. But you've got to choose your poison. Do you want it to look good year-round? Or do you want it to look great during the season? I'm a very seasonal guy."

Kris is a Texas Aggie. That explains a lot about his approach to life, which is a lot like his approach to grass: hard work and long hours followed by more hard work and longer

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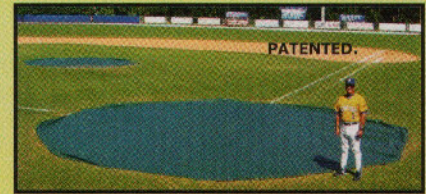
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Harris explains his management program to University of Georgia plant breeder and TifSport developer Dr. Wayne Hanna.

hours. Even as a student at Texas A&M he was putting in five days a week for the athletic department. "I worked for Leo Goertz, one of the best guys you'll ever want to meet," he says. It was Goertz who convinced Kris that he needed to look for an internship elsewhere to broaden his experience. "I'd been looking all over the country for something for the summer, and got a call back from Ed Mangun, who was in charge of Turner Field in Atlanta. I loved baseball and hate cold weather, so Atlanta was a no-brainer." Kris was more than eager to get started. "I finished a regional baseball tournament at A&M, drove all night, got to Atlanta about noon, worked the rest of the day and did the game that night."

"Ed is the best in the business, and Bob McCulloch, Ed's assistant at the time, is probably the best clay man you'll ever meet. I



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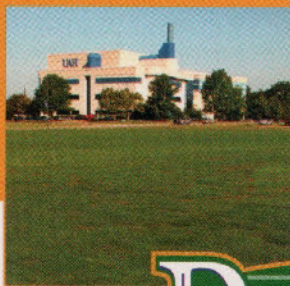
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guess that's where I learned about never trusting anything to chance, from Ed and Bob. Back then the Braves were owned by Turner Broadcasting and we were on TV almost every night, so everything always had to be perfect." When Kris got ready to return to school that September to finish his final semester, Ed asked him if he wanted to come back to work as an assistant when he graduated. For the record, Kris graduated in December and started with the Braves two weeks later.

Harris recalls, "I really didn't have a life except for Turner Field and turf. When I wasn't busy at the ballpark I started hanging out here at Tech. One thing led to another and

before too long, Shawn Teske called and asked me if I would be interested in taking on the sports turf manager's job here. I initially turned him down. I was working on the professional level and thought that was where I needed to be."

Back to campus

Teske persisted, and finally, in 2000, Kris came to Tech. "When I look back on it now, I don't know how I kept the job. I was totally out of my league. I had too much on my plate because I was trying way too hard to make things perfect like at Turner Field. I couldn't even get everything to mediocre! My grass

was fair at best that first year. I had a lot of problems. George O'Leary kept my job for me. He literally did."

Fortunately Harris got through that first year and got things on his schedule. He got his staff doing things his way, and his program just kind of took off from there. Now he's got one of the best programs in the country.

When Kris first arrived at Tech, all of the fields were Tifway 419. His decision to switch to TifSport turned out to be more luck than planning. "I'd heard that there was a good new bermuda out, but I didn't know anybody that had it yet. I also knew that my Tifway was working OK for me. So when we decided to

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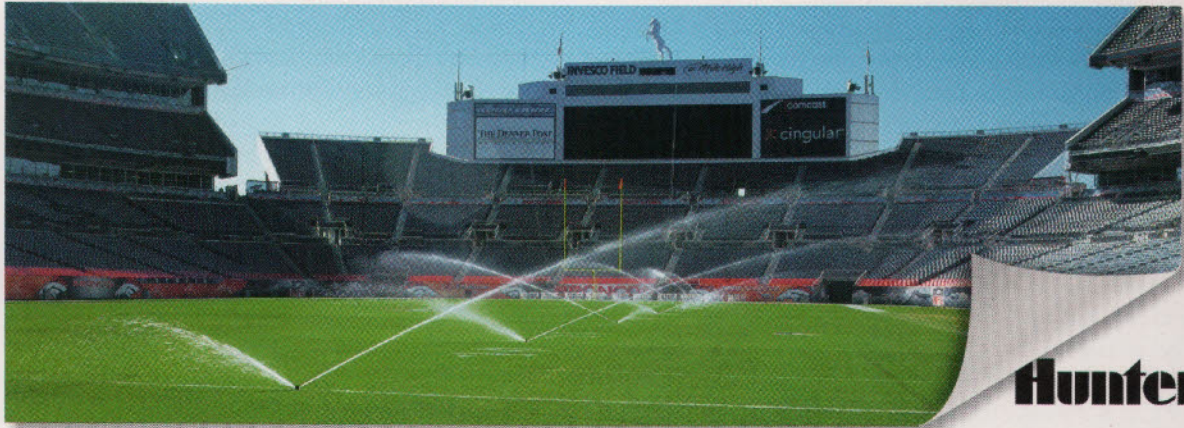
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re-work the baseball field, it was pretty much a given that it would be 419 again. Even my sod farm, Turfgrass America down in Camilla, was pushing me to go with Tifway. I also knew this was a big deal, because when you put grass down, your bosses want it to look green. They've just spent a lot of money and they want to see green grass."

True to form, Kris wasn't taking any chances. He'd been making the three-hour drive down to Camilla every week for at least six weeks to check on his grass. "It was really looking good - that is, until my final visit to the farm. It was a snafu that worked out for the best. My Tifway had been scalped to all get-out and I knew that if I took it back to Atlanta and put it down on my baseball field, they'd probably fire me right there on the spot," Harris says. "So the farm manager took me over to look at their new TifSport field. It was young but I thought, 'If we can hold this stuff

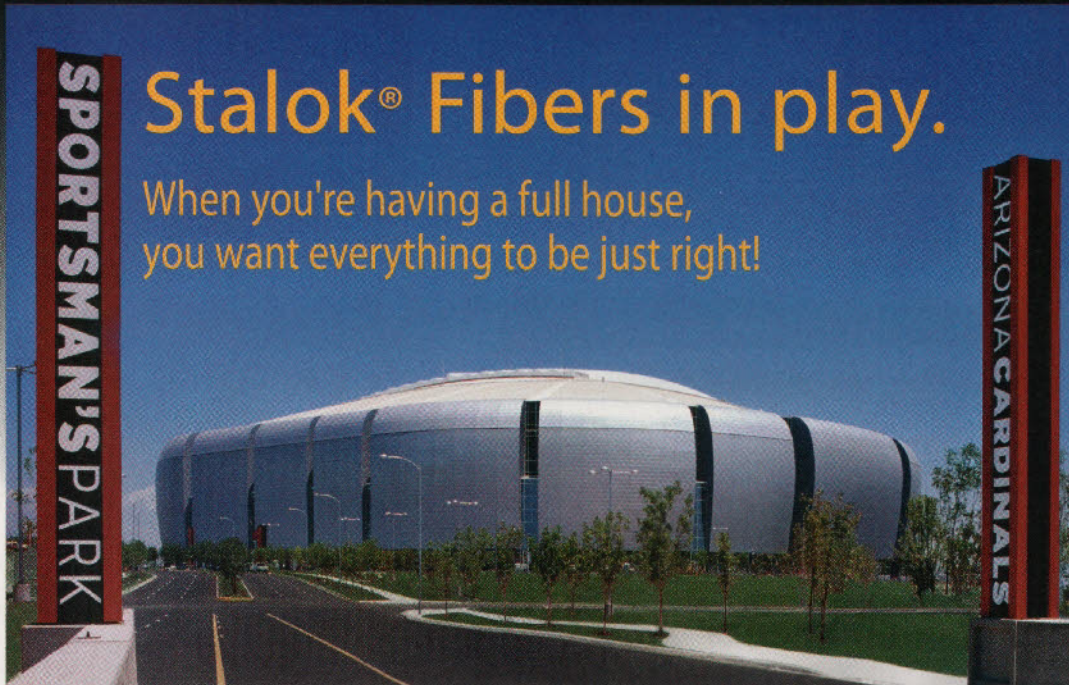
together, it just might work.' I knew I didn't want a grass that had been grown in clay, even if it was 419, and the TifSport was growing in the right kind of sandy soil. We cut it that night and started laying it down the next morning. It's amazing.

"I've got a picture I took two or three weeks after we put that TifSport down. It's of Mark Heinlein. He's with the Motz Group, and he's holding a six-foot piece of sod. I bet the roots are 12-inches deep. So I was excited. Whether it was the grass, or what I was doing, or a combination of both, something was working," Harris says.

That next summer, though, after the rye had all died back, Kris didn't like what he saw. "It was the first week of July and I thought for sure that I was going to have to re-sod my infield and hips again, but I decided to put it off until I got back from a rare two-week vacation."

Two weeks later he found that nearly the entire infield and hips were grown back in. "I was floored," he says now. "I'd never seen any turfgrass make that big of a turnaround in such a short time. So when my bosses decided that we were going to re-do the football field at the stadium that summer, I knew what I was going to do. I told Turfgrass America to cut my sod out of that same TifSport field.

"TifSport is a slow starter," Harris continues. "It needs a lot of heat before it will get going, especially in Atlanta. If your soil temperature's not where it needs to be, you've just got to play with it. When I start cutting it, I'm low, low, low. And I go down from there. When you keep it low, it's got no place else to go. It can't grow up. All it can do is grow out. We start mowing daily around here the first of May, and there's not much grass to cut then. We're basically just running the mowers over it. It's the same for all of my fields, my practice




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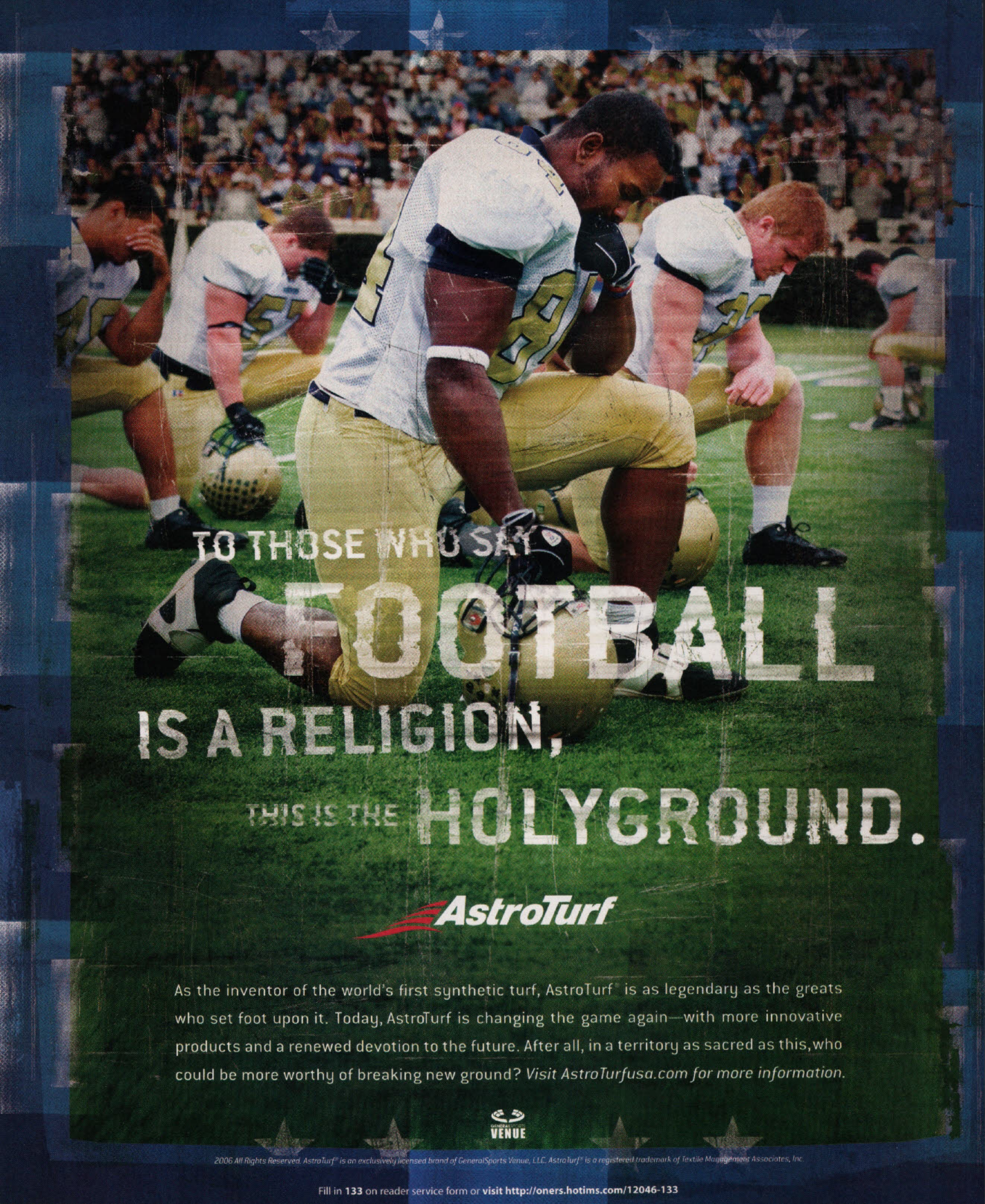
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I KNOW I WENT OUT ON A LIMB WHEN I DECIDED TO TAKE IT LOW. BUT I FOUND OUT THE LOWER IT GETS THE TIGHTER IT GETS. AND THE MORE IT GROWS Laterally, THE FASTER MY DIVOTS FILL IN.

fields, my football field, my baseball field. But once I start, I do everything I can to get my bermuda up and growing. I'm aerifying at least every two weeks, and every ten days when the temperature gets above 80 degrees.

"I also pound it as heavy as I can with fertilizer for 12 to 15 weeks. I noticed that this grass will respond to different fertilizers at different temperatures, so I started playing with that," he says. "I kind of go by daytime-night-time temperatures. Between 85 and 90 degrees, it responds great to ammonium sulfate. It just takes off. We catch our grass clippings every time we mow, and I noticed we were filling up three or four buckets with clippings every

couple of days the week we'd fertilize with ammonium sulfate. Then we'd go with ammonium nitrate the next week and our clippings would start to level off. And the next week, back with the ammonium sulfate and it would be blown away. But guess what? Once you start to get those 90-degree days, it's just the opposite. Ammonium nitrate makes it rock and roll, and it doesn't really have much response to ammonium sulfate. Once I figured all of that out and the fact that TifSport likes to be low, which I think is probably the most important thing, I haven't had any major problems since.

"You can't manage TifSport like your old 419," Harris says. "I can only tell you what

works for me here at Georgia Tech. I know I went out on a limb when I decided to take it low. But I found out the lower it gets the tighter it gets. And the more it grows laterally, the faster my divots fill in."

Keeping it low

It's early September, a week away from his home opener, and Kris's height of cut is usually up to 1/2-inch by now. But not this year. "I decided that this year I'm going to try to keep it at or below 3/8 of an inch all season long," Kris tells me. He knows there could be drawbacks with this strategy. "At 3/8 of an inch you can't hide a thing. If you've got



Harris sprays his field in early September.