

# *Daytona Speedway* *For Safe, Quality Turf*

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*The irrigation system that makes quality turf possible most of the year was designed mainly to control dust during the Daytona Supercross.*

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These four acres are maintained like a golf course fairway, even though few people walk or drive across it.

**C**ompaction is not a problem for Dick Hahne. Neither is cleat damage or overuse. Hahne is in charge of some of the most important turf in sports, yet no team or player actually uses his turf—unless he's in trouble.

Hahne is track superintendent at Daytona Speedway in Daytona Beach, FL. The former golf course superintendent from Ohio still has the same goal he has always had—quality turf year round—but for new reasons. The first is the safety of the drivers of race cars hurtling around the two-and-one-half mile track at 200 mph. The second is the appearance of the overall speedway to millions of television viewers twice a year during the Daytona 500 and the Firecracker 400.

Hahn is only the second track director Daytona Speedway has had in the 30 years since 'Red' Pugh built it for the France family. He is responsible for more than 500 acres of turf surrounding the track, but it's the four acres inside the track that is special. Known as "the football field" by those working at Daytona because it once served that purpose for Bethune-Cookman College, the infield has been converted from a low-maintenance bahiagrass field into a showcase for quality turf.

Today, the football field is Tifway bermudagrass overseeded in the fall with perennial ryegrass just as a golf fairway would be. The vast improvement was made possible by a new Toro automatic irrigation sys-

tem drawing water from a 43-acre lake on the Speedway grounds. "There was no way we could maintain quality turf without irrigation," states Hahne. The four acres are carefully groomed with a Jacobsen five-gang reel lift unit pulled by a Ford Tractor (Ford is the official tractor of Daytona). Hahne's crew follows a program of broadleaf weed control the same as a golf course.

The most surprising thing is not that the field is maintained solely for appearance and safety, it is that right after the Daytona 500 in February the field is completely destroyed in preparation for the Daytona Supercross, a major televised motocross event. Oddly enough, the irrigation system that makes quality turf possible the re-

# Joins The Race



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mainder of the year was designed by motocross course designer Gary Bailey mainly to control the dust during the Supercross. Each sprinkler head is strategically located to wet down the 1,000 tons of sand, limestone and crushed shells brought in for the event. Bailey designed the system so it could be turned on before, during or after races without interrupting them. He was opposed to water trucks driving across the course in between races.

"Dust is a serious problem for motocross," says Hahne. "I knew the Toro people from my superintendent days and put them together with Bailey to design the system for Daytona. This way we were able to get a system that could control the dust and

remain useful the rest of the year for the football field."

"The other aspect of the irrigation system designed specifically for the speedway is each of the 65 heads were installed one-half inch below grade with swing joints so they would not puncture a tire of a car sliding out of control across the infield," Hahne points out. "And, that's exactly what happened after the system was installed. A race car veered onto the infield and slid across a sprinkler head without damaging it or the car."

Following the Supercross, Hahne has three months to get the field back in shape for the Firecracker 400. In April all the lime-rock is removed from the field and and

spread on roads and parking lots at the speedway. Then the infield is graded for proper drainage, a seedbed prepared and fertilized and sprigged with Tifway. By July the bermudagrass is a shining green backdrop for the race.

Between July and February, the track is used to test tires and new cars. In preparation for the Daytona 500 held in February, Hahne overseeds the entire infield with a perennial ryegrass tee mix in November. "The infield is the most visible in racing," Hahne claims. "Quality turf goes along with quality events. John Riddle, the general manager, and the France family clearly want these races and the speedway to represent quality."