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**SportsTURF 1992
Man Of The Year:**

ROGER BOSSARD— FAMILY STYLE

Life begins on Opening Day for baseball fans, but no one looked forward to the beginning of the 1991 season more than Roger Bossard, the Chicago White Sox groundskeeper. It marked the first game at new Comiskey Park, a giant coming out party for a field built just a stone's throw from the legendary old Comiskey Park.

The new park project was a groundskeeper's dream. Bossard was given free reign to design the field, a once-in-a-lifetime chance to eliminate many nagging maintenance headaches and

construct a lasting sports field monument. Like an expectant father, he was at once anxious, excited, and proud. Four days before the season opener, the ballpark was "baptized."

"About 1-1/2 inches of rain fell on the field," Bossard remembers. "It was its first test with a good amount of rain. Everything worked perfectly."

Opening Day went off without a hitch, showing off the new stadium as a cathedral to America's favorite pastime. While most fans probably focused on the stadium's massive entrance, the video scoreboard or the pinwheels that lit up whenever the home team took one down, the playing field itself was rich in



Hunter I-40 sprinklers at work in the New Comiskey Park. Photo courtesy Hunter Industries.

tradition, yet constructed using the latest in sports field technology.

Roger Bossard's efforts designing and building the new Comiskey Park, as well as his continued commitment to maintaining high-quality standards in sports turf have earned him the *sportsTURF* 1992 Man of the Year Award.

Building A Dream

The old Comiskey Park was a classic ballfield, brimming with style and tradition. What it didn't have, however, was adequate drainage and irrigation. Bossard, who had been a groundskeeper there since the 1960s, knew this all too well.

One of the key improvements Bossard made in the new field centered around its drainage system. There are more than 9,000 feet of drain tile beneath the field. In a herringbone style, the drains extend from a six-inch main that travels from around second base straight down center field. The system includes five exhaust planar flow outlets with check valves.

There are no pumps in the drainage system. The force of gravity causes water to move through the drains. Last summer, Chicago received 3-1/4 inches of rain in a 10-hour period.

Predictably, the rain came, but his fears were unfounded. The field was in satisfactory shape for the game despite the rain that left areas of the city flooded.

"I wanted to be able to accept four to 4-1/2 inches of rain and be able to play in 1-1/2 hours," Bossard reveals.

Bossard adds that the drainage tile isn't the only factor in keeping the water away. The soil also makes a big difference. Years earlier, he had conducted his own soil experiments. His crew used to kid him about his "coffins" filled with various sand-peat mixtures. For three years,

Bossard worked to find the mix that did best in Chicago conditions.

The final mixture, which composes the top 12 inches of soil at the new Comiskey, is 100 to 95 percent sand. The top four inches have five percent peat. Bossard took sand samples from around the Midwest before deciding on a sand from Lake Michigan. It took 6,700 tons of sand to fill the outfield areas.

The turfgrass is a mixture of Delphi, Glade, Parade, and Rugby bluegrasses and Ph.D., a four-cultivar ryegrass mixture. The bluegrasses provide durability while the ryegrasses offer some extra color, Bossard says.

In designing the irrigation system for the new park, Bossard enlisted the help of Jim Flannigan of Century Rain Aid. They needed a system that would work well on a sand-based field.

"Stadium irrigation equipment has to conform to rigid safety requirements, such as positive pop-downs and complete retractability to ground level," Flannigan says. "The Hunter I-40 sprinklers met their requirements. More than 50 were installed on the infield, outfield, in the bullpens, and along the baselines from home to first and third bases."

Muellermist Irrigation, Broadview, IL,

was the irrigation contractor on the project. Andy Wright, president of Muellermist, says the irrigation system needed to be both water efficient and user friendly.

"His [Bossard's] ground crew can fine-tune the water distribution pattern in each zone with a small adjustment right at the top of the head while the water is running," says Wright. "It's a real time saver."

Not everything at the new Comiskey is "new." In a move that had more to do with preserving what "worked" than nostalgia, the infield mix from the old park was saved and reinstalled at the new facility. Primarily calcined clay, the infield mix was conditioned with Soilmaster from Pro's Choice. The soil conditioner has a finer granular mix than standard calcined clay, Bossard says, and it holds more moisture than other products he has worked with through the years.

Moving the old infield to the new park was a logistical challenge and one of the final pieces in the construction puzzle. Forms held the outfield and sideline turf and soil in place while the remaining White Sox home games were played. After the last game, Bossard supervised moving the infield mix.

"He did a very good job of managing, considering he was installing one field while maintaining another at the same time," recalls Roger O'Conner, groundskeeper for the Chicago Cubs.

Path To New Comiskey

It's been said that Tommy Lasorda bleeds Dodger Blue. Bossard's blood then, must be the deep brown color of a properly moistened infield. The son of Chicago White Sox groundskeeper Gene Bossard and grandson of legendary Cleveland Indians groundskeeper Emil Bossard, groundskeeping is in Roger's veins. His earliest memories involve grass and dirt.

"I knew at 10 what I was going to do when I grew up," Bossard recalls. "That's just how I grew up. I was weaned and raised at the park."

Old Comiskey park may have been every boy's dream, but for Roger Bossard, it was a real life playground. His father, Gene, was Chicago's hero, returning from a brief stint in the Navy during World War II to rescue infielders from errant ground balls. Roger was only too happy to tag along with his father to the ballpark.

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MAN OF THE YEAR

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At first, the massive field intimidated the youngster, but he quickly learned its ins and outs. There were pastures of green grass on which to play, endless stairs to climb, long ramps to race down and, of course, baseball. Bossard still has the first White Sox Jersey he wore to a father-son baseball game.

As a teenager in 1967, he signed onto the grounds staff. No special treatment came to the tow-headed, happy-go-lucky fresh recruit. He dragged hoses with the rest of the crew, learning the proper rhythm of walking and spraying an infield. Not that absorbing knowledge was a priority for Bossard at that time. He simply enjoyed his days in the sun as one of the boys of summer.

All seasons must turn, and the same was true for carefree summers at Comiskey Park. World War I was his grandfather's war, World War II his father's. Vietnam was Bossard's turn. He joined the Navy and was sent to DeNang.

Bossard returned from the service in 1969, ready to meet his destiny. The warm sun shining over Comiskey brought happy memories of the past as well as

promises for the future. With wiser eyes, he watched his father work, and he absorbed the many of the techniques and practices. In his spare time, he took courses at Purdue University.

It didn't take long for Roger to pick up the nuances of professional groundskeeping for a major league baseball team. He learned the *tricks of the trade*. Although he swears it doesn't happen today, Bossard says his father and then manager Eddie Stanky would see to it that the game balls were stored in a room with a humidifier. By game time, the balls would appear dry on the surface, but the insides would have enough extra moisture to dampen their flight. This was viewed as an advantage to the then weak-hitting White Sox.

Other techniques that were popular in the past included cutting the infield grass and sloping the foul line dirt to encourage balls to roll either foul or fair, and dampening basepaths to slow opposing fleet-footed base stealers.

Those "tricks" are history, Bossard maintains, but what hasn't changed is groundskeepers' willingness to keep home team players happy. "My father maintained every position as each player wanted it," he says.

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Bossard can roll off infield preferences the way a chef can list the favorite dishes of his regular customers. Robin Ventura likes the base a little on the soft side. Ozzie Smith wants the front of the shortstop soft, but the back on the hard side.

Legendary baseball team owner Bill Veeck used to say that a good groundskeeper could save the home team 10 to 12 games a year. Bossard isn't sure he agrees, but he's willing to take credit for three to five.

"The most important part of the baseball field is the infield," he says

Ritual Excellence

Keeping the infield in top shape is one of Bossard's priorities. During the season, it's not unusual for him to put in 15-hour days.

"He's great for the profession because is so hard-working," says Ken Mrock, chief groundskeeper for the Chicago Bears. "His hard work helps earn other groundskeepers respect."

Field irrigation begins early on game days. Bossard wants watering to be completed by 9 a.m. Home games are televised on WGN, so he makes sure the field will look good on camera. Crews use

triplex greensmowers to stripe the turf and give a high-quality cut.

Infield work requires a steady routine and lots of hand labor. The goal is to allow moisture to penetrate the infield, giving a firm, even surface for play. After spraying the infield, Bossard gives it a bit of time to dry. When the surface looks dry, dragging begins with a steel drag to even the infield surface. More spraying follows.

"A groundskeeper strives to give ballplayers what they want," Bossard says. "If they like it, you don't change it."

By game time, Bossard has the field looking perfect. Every stripe is in place and the infield is as smooth as a pool table. The White Sox players have confidence in the infield bounces, which enables them to bare hand grounders when necessary.

Bossard's work has also earned respect from his fellow groundskeepers. Professional sports are a way of life in Chicago, so it's almost a civic duty to keep fields in top shape. Chicago groundskeepers know how tough it can be to provide a high-quality playing surface given the city's unpredictable weather.

"It's a real asset to Chicago to see how well-maintained the field is," says Mrock.

"The stadium is great to look at, but the real sight is when you see that emerald field."

Bossard and Cubs' groundskeeper O'Connor have a friendly rivalry. Not long after the new Comiskey opened, O'Connor dropped by for a visit.

"I told Roger he needs some vines on the wall to make his job more interesting," O'Connor jokes.

Bossard has proven his groundskeeping skills time and time again. He's built his own field. Still, there is a prize—one his father was able to win—that eludes him.

"I'd love to have a world championship ring," he says "It's not the money, it's the win."

His mind wanders back to the fall of 1959 when he was a boy in a world championship clubhouse, dodging sprays of champagne. His was father was in the midst of the celebration, knowing his field helped the boys in black to the top of the world.

Spring training is but a month away, and hope springs eternal on opening day. Like many White Sox fans, Bossard hopes his field will host the 1933 world champs, adding memories to the field he built. □

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