



*It's the end of the school year for some new fields — the end of the semester for others. Just how good are those report cards?*



Joe Robbie Stadium undergoes sand profile distribution, covering drain lines and irrigation lines. Photos courtesy: The Motz Group and Deborah Gray Mitchell.

# A “Commentary” Report Card on New and Rebuilt Fields

By Steve and Suz Trusty

Just as kindergartners timidly faced that first day of school, the fields within the Class of '95 faced their first season of play. With freshly manicured turf and a bright suit of new paint, these fields were braced for the tough tests ahead. Sure they'd had a great diet of nutrients, were deeply rooted, and many even had appropriate “wraps” in case of rain, but were they mature enough to handle the stress?

What if “classroom” conditions were less than ideal? What if their “teachers” had limited funds for supplies and few helpers? Would the coaches and players like and accept them? How would the fans react — especially those whose ticket prices had increased, or whose tax dollars had been used to support the field's appearance? It's the end of the school year for some new fields — the end of the semester for others. Just how good are those report cards?

## Denver's Coors Field

*Sports Illustrated* writers put their mark of approval on the Colorado Rockies' Coors Field. In *SI*'s July 10, 1995 issue, in, “The Play's the Thing,” the article states, “Colorado, a contender in only its

third season, is flush with the cash and goodwill generated by gorgeous Coors Field. Try telling a Rockies fan baseball is passé. Winning teams and attractive stadiums still sell.”

And in the same magazine's July 31 issue, in an article titled, “Rocky Mountain Home Run Fever,” was this positive segment: “The Rockies are baseball's most agoraphobic team, with a 28-15 record at their dazzling new home, Coors Field, but a 17-20 mark on the road.” And, in the same article was a quote from Larry Walker, the 28-year-old star of the Rockies who “has become almost a branch office of the Denver Chamber of Commerce. ‘Did you know there are 42 miles of cable under the field to keep it always at least 58 degrees?’ he asks a visitor to Coors. It's a treat to play here. That's why you see people getting here at 10 a.m. for a 7 p.m. game.’”

## Cleveland's Jacobs Field

*Sports Illustrated* also gives top grades to Jacobs Field of Cleveland, OH. Also in the July 10 article, “The Play's the Thing,” was this quote: “In most major league ballparks this season, it's so quiet you can hear the attendance drop. Then there's Jacobs Field, the 15-month-old home of the (Cleveland) Indians ...

You put the Indians in Jacobs Field, and you create something special.”

## Jacksonville Sports Entertainment and Conventions Facilities

Good comments keep coming in from turf professionals on the field of the new Jacksonville Sports Entertainment and Conventions Facilities. It's “a quality field built to USGA specs.” And, “They put the time and money into this field to do it right.” “An excellent field.”

## Joe Robbie Stadium

The one-two punch of baseball and football puts extra stress on a young field. For two months of the year, when the two sports overlap, playing conditions aren't ideal for either team. Football players must contend with sections of “dirt,” those highly maintained skinned areas on which much of baseball is played. The baseball players must deal with the torn up turf that is the aftermath of 22 spike-footed gladiators battling over each inch of forward progress.

Four NFL teams — the Oakland Raiders, the San Francisco 49ers, the San Diego Chargers and the Miami Dolphins — share grass fields with baseball teams. (The Pittsburgh Steelers and Pirates share the artificial turf of Three Rivers Stadium. The St. Louis Rams

and Cardinals shared Busch Stadium when their seasons overlapped last summer. The Rams recently moved to their new stadium.)

At Miami's Joe Robbie Stadium, where the existing P.A.T. system was replaced by an entirely new state-of-the-art P.A.T. system this year, weather conditions brought an additional challenge to head groundskeeper, Alan Sigwardt and his crew. September was filled with heavy rainfall, making moisture levels within the skinned portion of the field difficult to control.

An article by Steven Wine for The Associated Press, picked up in the September 19, 1995, issue of *USA Today*, contained several comments from Sigwardt. He says, "We have good turf-growing weather, but having to protect and baby that piece of dirt is difficult." To anyone who has experienced the Florida rains, this is obviously an under-



**Principals in Joe Robbie's renovation were Joe Motz, president and CEO (left), and Mark Heinlein, senior vice president, of The Motz Group.**

statement. The skinned area was removed and the infield resodded with big roll sod at the end of the Marlins' season.

Still, even during the less-than-ideal conditions, the players love that turf. Wine's article quotes Dolphin's linebacker Bryan Cox, who says, "Even with the infield dirt, I'd rate our field above all the (artificial) turf fields."

Wine reported Steelers' running back Bam Morris as saying of the Three Rivers Stadium, "It's dangerous. You've got artificial turf, you've got home plate, first base, the pitcher's mound and in some spots, you've got lumps where those mounds are. It's a bad field, but we've got to play on it."

This reinforces the survey results announced by the NFL Players Association in January 1995. In that survey, Joe Robbie Stadium was ranked second among the most preferred stadiums by NFL players.

Additional results of that survey revealed that 93 percent of NFL players believe that artificial turf is more likely than grass to contribute to injury. Fifty-four percent identified an artificial turf injury they suffered that they believe would not have happened on grass. Ninety-one percent believe artificial turf is more likely to shorten their careers. Ninety percent believe artificial turf is more likely to worsen their quality of life after football.

#### **Kansas City Gets Real**

Artificial turf got the boot in Kansas City during 1994. Natural turf now provides the playing surface in the stadiums of both the Royals and Chiefs.

Though murmurs spread among the city's baseball fans of turf disease problems throughout the summer of 1995,

extended periods of 100-degree temperatures and 90 to 95 percent humidity levels should be expected to do some damage. High-use turf on golf courses and sports fields throughout the Midwest suffered during this period. Play in the Kauffman Stadium (for the Royals) put more stress on that new turf than that of the relatively idle Arrowhead Stadium (for the Chiefs). Still, reports from on-site spectators confirmed the view on the TV screen — things are looking good in Kansas City. Unofficial trainers' reports reveal feedback from Kansas City football and baseball players who give top grades to their new "real grass" fields.

Does grass affect play? Will natural turf fields — old, new and revamped — still be cause for controversy? Sure they will.

On October 16, "Monday Night Football" commentators frequently mentioned the newly installed sod and longer-than-usual grass of Denver's Mile High Stadium as the prime cause of any player's slip or failure to make a "clean" cut for an up-field run. This continued throughout the game, even when replays clearly showed player error or the not-so-gentle nudge of an opponent as the reason for the missed play. While some divots of turf were torn out, this is a by-product of any highly competitive football game. There were no "chunks" of slipping sod, no loose patches within the field surface.

Perhaps some redemption was made in the hearts of sports turf managers nationwide when those same "Monday Night Football" commentators uttered this statement during the October 9 game between the San Diego Chargers and the Chiefs. They praised the Kansas City Double Stadium Sports Complex, talked about how great the facilities are, and then said, "And they went to grass, finally, thankfully, on both fields, to make it perfect."

That's an A for sure. □

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**Joe Robbie's renovation was completed last April, in time for the Florida Marlins to play on the entirely new, state-of-the-art P.A.T. system.**