

FIELD OF THE YEAR



Midway Stadium Earns Professional Baseball Field of the Year Award

by Bob Tracinski



Some creative striping, courtesy Connie Rudolph and her staff. Photos courtesy: Connie Rudolph

Days are never dull at St. Paul, Minnesota's Midway Stadium, the STMA 2000 Professional Baseball Field of the Year. With comedian and film star Bill Murray and master promoter Mike Veeck part of the St. Paul Saints' ownership, home games are tops in entertainment, drawing nearly perpetual sellout crowds, setting attendance records for minor league play and often outdrawing Major League Baseball's Minnesota Twins.

When the norm for Head Groundskeeper, Connie Rudolph, CSFM, is sharing the maintenance area with a pig pen for the porker that

carries out the game balls, why would an elephant throwing out the first pitch faze her? Sure, it is a bit unusual to have hundreds of ping pong balls pelting the field from a hovering helicopter, followed by a convergence of fans seeking the balls marked for the best prizes. And the local TV news did cover the night fans urged her to "run the stairs" just days before her fourth child was born. They only wanted to cash in on the free Arbys roast beef sandwich promised to all attendees if Rudolph "delivered" during the game (she didn't.)

Flexibility is just one of the attributes Rudolph incorporates in the

field's award-winning program. She has achieved the Certified Sports Field Manager status, demonstrating her superior level of competence and her commitment to excellence in field management. She needs all those skills to meet the stadium's multiple challenges.

Rudolph says, "Midway Stadium withstands tremendous use from a variety of sources, including the St. Paul Saints minor league baseball team, senior men's baseball, Legion baseball, and the state high school baseball championship tournament, high school and college level football, a semi-professional football team, a



Concerts and other on-field events cause considerable damage to the turf.

women's football team, soccer and major national concerts. We host over 200 individual athletic contests during the season, in addition to the concerts and other special events. The short season encompassing three sports leads to a maintenance challenge."

Midway Stadium holds 6,300 guests, with 3,500 in the grandstand and 2,800 in bleachers. Saints games will draw 275,000 people over the season. For major concerts, fans also move onto the field, pushing single event attendance to 15,000.

Rudolph says, "Field scheduling is coordinated between the City of St. Paul, which owns and runs the facility, and the team, which is the main lease holder, and books the major national concerts. The season starts in April with college and high school baseball, moves into May with the Saints' spring training and exhibition games, followed in the summer by the Saints' season, and generally, the playoffs. When the baseball season ends, the area around the mound, home plate and the first and third basepath areas are resodded since the configuration of football and soccer places one sideline intersecting first and third bases. Football and soccer kick in during September and run to the first week in November when cold and snow end the season."

The regular staff includes Rudolph, Don Raway (the assistant Groundskeeper) and the equivalent of one-half of another full-time employee. Rudolph can borrow employees as needed from the building maintenance crew. This provides the flexibility to cover field maintenance

nance from 7 a.m. until the end of an event—which could run to 11 p.m.

Rudolph notes, "One scheduling dilemma we faced included a Saints' baseball playoff game on a Thursday night, a high school football game on Friday night and two high school soccer games played on Saturday. On

another occasion, we had to turn the field around for a Saints game the day after a Bob Dylan concert that had 15,000 people trampling the grass for four hours. To add to our troubles, it rained two inches overnight. We pull these sessions off through a combination of careful planning and extra help."



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Maintenance program for Midway Stadium, St. Paul, Minn.

Maintenance Program—Playing Field

Fertilization:

Based on spring soil test results
Six applications per year with natural product (Roots 15-3-8) for plant nutrients, organic material and bio-stimulants
First application mid to late May at rate of 0.5 lbs. N per 1,000 square feet
Total N per year = 5 to 6 lbs.
Once per season apply a polymer-coated potash 0-0-59
Milorganite is final application of season after all field use ends

Aeration:

Four to six times per year, alternating core, spike, slice and shatter

Topdressing:

At least twice per year with 80/20 mix closely matching original soil profile
Fill low spots as needed

Overseeding:

Spring and fall, mainly where football is played
Heavy use areas as needed
50/50 Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass blend

Resodding:

Each fall around mound, home plate and base paths
Spot resod with thick-cut squares as needed during season

Edging:

Major edging once or twice each year
Light edging every three to four weeks as needed
Edges swept daily

Mowing:

Three times per week with reel mower at 1-

7/8-inches outfield; 1-3/4-inches infield

Pesticide Applications:

Used only as needed and then as spot treatments when possible

Irrigation:

As needed to meet needs of turf, approximately 1 inch per week combined rainfall and irrigation during growing season
Syringe as needed to reduce heat stress

Maintenance Program Outside Grounds

Fertilization spring combined with weed control
Fall fertilization

Spot spray weed control as needed around entrance

Picnic area:

Aerate and fertilize spring, apply annual ryegrass

maintenance

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Specifications

The ballpark was built in 1982. The field is 80 percent sand, 20 percent peat, with an agralime (crushed aggregate) infield. A 50/50 turf blend of Kentucky Bluegrasses and perennial ryegrass helps withstand the multiple sports and long season. The irrigation system is hydraulic with a combination of Toro 640 and super 600 heads. Metal halide lights, topping 12 light towers, each 110 feet high, enable the Saints' 44 home games to be televised.

Rudolph says, "The field was built on a landfill.

Soil borings taken 10 years ago revealed readable newsprint 100 feet down and a 6-foot void about 10 feet down. Left field is constantly sinking. Consequently, the drain tiles are ineffective in that area. Also, the warning track doesn't drain properly. Twice in the past 10 years we've hired a landscaping company to strip off the sod, level and grade and relay the sod.

"To cut costs and put off major renovation, we've redone small areas ourselves, cutting the sod thick, rolling it back, filling the hole and replacing the sod. With the thick cut of the sod, repairs during the day are ready for play at night. On the warning track, we contracted with another city department to add two sewer drains outside the outfield wall. We then regraded the track so the water runs to the new drains. So far, both solutions have been effective."

With no breaks between the triple-sport scheduling, it's hard for Rudolph and Raway to find windows for repairs, sod patching and such maintenance procedures as edging, aeration, overseeding and topdressing. Any opening in the schedule is

Connie Rudolph, CSFM, named George Toma Golden Rake Award Recipient



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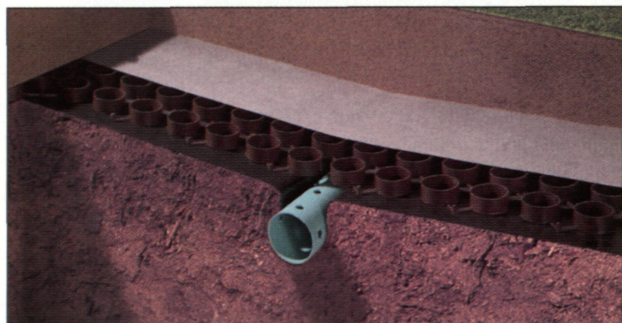
The George Toma Golden Rake Award is issued annually to someone who is on the quest to reach their highest goals and is demonstrating that “and then some” spirit along the way.

The year 2000 recipient, Connie Rudolph, CSFM, entered college seeking a degree in home economics with a business minor. Because she also loved being outside and taking care of the grass, she found her summer jobs working on golf courses, changing cups and doing the trimming. Following graduation, she started working for the City of St. Paul, on the golf courses as an assistant to the greenskeeper.

When the groundskeeper position opened up at Midway Stadium in 1991, she applied, was selected and immediately started what has become her long term commitment keeping the field in the best possible conditions for all types and levels of play. While continually upgrading her knowledge and expertise in the field of sports turf management, she's also been instrumental in the formation and development of the Minnesota Sports Turf Managers Association, serving as a board member and as president. She's on the newsletter editorial committee for the national STMA. She's spoken at several regional turfgrass conferences. She's taken the time to prepare for and successfully achieve Certified Sports Field Manager status. And, during this interval, she and her husband, Randy, are raising four delightful children: Mitchell, 10, Molly, 8, Henry, 5, and Joey, who was born July 1, 1999.

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Crew members resod a section of the outfield

filled with softball games, dog shows, car shows, boxing matches, fantasy camps, company parties and even the filming of commercials. Two national

commercials were filmed at Midway Stadium: one for Norelco shavers, and one, featuring Ken Griffey Jr., for Wheaties. The Stadium and Saints

team also have been the subject of such national television programming as 60 Minutes, ESPN, the Today Show and a series on the FX channel.

"It takes nearly constant overseeding, aerating and topdressing to keep the outfield in repair," notes Rudolph. "We also paint the field once a week for football and chalk over the infield and the two corners that are on the agralime area. We've adopted a program of spot patching when the field needs it and we can fit it in. We take 1-square-foot-chunks of sod about 8-inches deep from the outer edges of the field or from our 20-by-40 foot-sod nursery behind the outfield fence. We oversee the sections where the sod was removed with our standard seed blend and they usually fill in quickly. To protect the field from damage during concerts and other special events we use large tarps for center stage and enforce strict rules for any traffic or equipment use on the turf.

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"Our agralime is from a local source. It's a crushed limestone rather than a true dirt, so we don't have to tarp it to retain playability. We water it a couple times a day for Saints games and monitor it closely to match the conditions they prefer. Another unique feature of the field is the lack of a need for an infield tarp. The field and skinned areas drain well enough after a heavy rain that games usually can be played within an hour after the rain has stopped. The Saints have had only eight rain outs in eight seasons of play."

Rudolph is supplied with a timing list for promotional events affecting the field so she'll have the opportunity to make appropriate preparations and plan for whatever follow up is needed to retain the excellent field conditions players, team management, the city and the fans have come to expect. Some things take a lot more planning than others.



Besides stressing the turf, events can be stressful to those responsible for cleaning up.

She puts the Bill Murray movie marathon nights in the fairly easy class. Once the game is wrapped for the night, fans move to the field with their blankets, popcorn and drinks. The movies are projected against the center field fence and could run until 5 or 6 a.m.

The dog day afternoon events are tougher, even though they've been moved from the heat of summer to September. Rudolph says, "People

bring their dogs for all sorts of events on the field, from hide the shoe, to races, to the doggy beauty salon. Though the owners bring their own 'doggy clean up tools' and there are lots of volunteer helpers, we always end up dealing with some dead spots and rapidly growing green spots we must make disappear before the next event."

Whatever the new promotions slotted for Midway Stadium in 2001, Rudolph will be ready for the challenge and those Field of the Year conditions will once again provide the great setting that has won the heart of the City of St. Paul.

Bob Tracinski is the business communications manager for the John Deere Worldwide Commercial & Consumer Equipment Division headquartered in Raleigh, N.C. He serves as public relations co-chair for the national Sports Turf Managers Association.

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