

Doc's Dugout - An Inning from Our Past

by Dr. Kent Kurtz - STMA Historian

Upon my return home from the STMA Annual Conference & Exhibition in Colorado Springs, I took a moment to reflect on the tremendous impact STMA has had on my life and on me as a person. I feel privileged to have seen where STMA has been and to now have a glimpse of where STMA is going. And believe me, the future has never looked brighter.

During my years of involvement with STMA, I have known many of STMA's "Founding Fathers" on a professional and personal basis. I spent countless hours sharing meals, ideas, and fellowship and touring their facilities. In future issues, I plan to share much more about some of those pioneers.

Harry C. Gill, Jr., the "Founding Father," had a dream and a vision of taking the groundskeeping profession out of its antiquated state where secrets of the trade were private, personal and never shared, to a new plateau in which the "tricks of the trade" began to be shared. Help and friendship began to become commonplace and new ideas became available to everyone who wanted to learn.

Harry rose above the others in his profession in the late 1970s when he took the lead and began sending Christmas cards to fellow professionals, some he knew, but many he didn't.

The message he sent in those cards was his desire to gather together once per year for the purpose of sharing and learning from each other while at the same time assisting those less skilled to learn and to achieve higher standards. Well, it worked. The formational STMA meeting was held on March 4, 1981, in conjunction with the 1981 Midwest Regional Turf Conference at Purdue University. That first meeting brought together more than 30 individuals who shared a common bond, groundskeeping.

Who Were The Officers Elected in 1981?

President, Dick Ericson, Metropolitan Stadium, Bloomington MN; **Vice President, Harry C Gill, Jr.**, Milwaukee County Stadium, Milwaukee, WI; **Treasurer, Dan Weisenberger**, Intercollegiate Athletic Administration, Purdue University; **Executive Secretary, Erik Madisen, Jr.**, National Institute of Park & Grounds Management, Appleton, WI.

Who Were the Directors Elected in 1981?

Tony Burnett, RFK Memorial Stadium, Washington D.C.; **Jay Bolt**, Grand Valley State College, Allendale, MI; **Pete DeVos**, Culver Military Academy, Culver, IN; **Robert Gillie**, Fort Wayne Community Schools, Fort Wayne, IN; **Dale Sandin**, The Orange Bowl, Miami, FL; **George Toma**, Kansas City Royals & Chiefs, Kansas City, MO.

A Profile of STMA's First President - Dick Ericson

Dick Ericson was just a kid when his career as a groundskeeper began in 1942 at Lexington Park, home of the old class AAA St. Paul Saints minor league team in Minnesota. After a stint in the Korean War as a sea plane

tender on a navy ship in Korean waters, Dick returned to the Twin Cities in 1952.

Thrilled to be back on land after the war, he took a job as head groundskeeper at the Niccollet Park for the New York Giants' Minneapolis Millers Class AAA team. Ironically, the New York Giants were scheduled to move to the newly built Metropolitan Stadium in 1956, but the O'Malley family convinced the Giants' owner, Horace Stoneham, to follow the Dodgers to the West Coast.

Major league baseball finally came to Metropolitan Stadium in 1961 when the Washington Senators moved to become the Minnesota Twins. This is when Dick began to work his magic. For two decades Dick made his appointed rounds - through rain, mud, sleet, snow and bitter cold temperatures. The "Met," as it was called, was always ready for the Twins and Vikings, even if it took hay bales, space heaters and work shifts until 4:00 AM in 30 degree below zero weather.

Sometimes, in a friendly sort of way, he had to put up with the whims of Minnesota players and coaches.

"Billy Martin always wanted me to keep the grass long at third base so the ball would slow down for Harmon Killebrew," Dick said, "But Harmon would keep telling me to cut it so the ball would get there faster. Martin and Killebrew never did agree."

So Dick did it his way.

Dick was very diligent in maintaining the home field advantage, one that sometimes stretched the outer limits of baseball's rule book. Dick remembers the 1965 World Series against the Dodgers and Maury Wills. "We put seven wheelbarrow loads of sand near first base to reduce Will's ability to steal second base. The umpire eventually caught on and made us take some of the sand out. But when the umpires were done with us, we still had six loads in there.

"Sometimes we would also move the fence in or out and adjust the height up or down at the beginning of the season. But which direction depended upon the ability of the power hitters and pitchers each season."

Finally, in 1981, when Herbert H. Humphrey Metrodome was completed, the Twins, Vikings, Minnesota Golden Gophers and Dick Ericson all moved their talents there. And until 1995, when Dick Ericson retired, he was the only head groundskeeper the Minnesota Twins ever had.

Dick Ericson's true dedication to the profession has touched many people, including me. And there wasn't a blade of grass at the old Met Stadium or a piece of carpet at the Metrodome that hasn't been touched by his hands.

We all wish Dick much happiness and success in his retirement. STMA won't forget your contributions, Dick. We all hope you will continue to attend our meetings when you are able and that you will be a driving force in our future.

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