

Doc's Dugout - An Inning From Our Past

by Dr. Kent Kurtz - STMA Historian

Little is known about the early groundskeepers except that they worked long, hard days and, until recently, didn't have much to work with in terms of grasses, products, supplies and equipment. These early groundskeepers learned their trade from "trial and error," and expanded upon their successes and failures. There were no formal courses or classes available to them and even if there had been, the long working days and demands of the facility took up most of their waking hours. In the early years, many of the groundskeepers came into the position by working their way up from a clubhouse boy like Roy "Cotton" Bogren of the Chicago Cubs. Bogren worked under groundskeeper, Bob Dorr, for many years and inherited the job upon Dorr's retirement. When Bogren retired, the position was passed on to understudy, Frank Capperelli, under the guidance of Lubie Veal, who was brought over from Cincinnati to become the Assistant Stadium Operations Director. Lubie is now retired and works with the minor league ball parks. In the old days, ball parks like Wrigley Field were used much like stadiums today for multi-purpose events. Besides being the home of the Chicago Bears for many years, Wrigley Field hosted such major attractions during World War II, as a women's softball league, soccer, circuses, pro boxing and wrestling, skiing and ice skating. Likewise, Chicago's Comiskey Park hosted soccer, rock concerts, demolition derbies, the Chicago Cardinals (now the Arizona Cardinals), and, of course, the Chicago White Sox.

During the '30s, '40s and '50s, under the tutelage of Emil Bossard, head groundskeeper at Cleveland Stadium, the groundskeeping profession began to gain impetus. The entire Bossard family became a major influence on the early emergence of the groundskeeper. The Emil Bossard School of Groundskeeping was the training available at that time for the care of ballfields. George Toma, NFL and Kansas City Royals, was one of its early graduates. Emil also had three sons who became groundskeepers. Harold and Marshall remained at Cleveland when Emil retired, and Gene went to Chicago to take over duties at Comiskey Park. Harold had a son, Brian, who was Head Groundskeeper at San Diego's Jack Murphy Stadium. Steve Wightman took over the duties there when Brian left to take over the duties at Yankee Stadium. Unfortunately, Brian died suddenly in 1991, leaving his cousin, Roger (Gene's son) as the sole surviving 3rd Generation groundskeeper in the Bossard family. Roger is currently head groundskeeper at Comiskey Park in Chicago. He began working for his father, Gene, in 1967 and took over as head groundskeeper when Gene retired in 1983.

Comiskey Park saw its first baseball game on July 1, 1910. For 80 years, the old park lured such name players as Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, George Kell, Cy Young, Ted Williams and Mickey Mantle. When the new Comiskey Park opened in 1991, right across the street from the old stadium, the explod-

ing scoreboard, center field bleachers, arch window and even the infield soil were brought to the new site to carry on a tradition.

I have known Roger Bossard for the past 14 years as a close friend, colleague and professional. In my opinion, he is one of the best baseball men in this country. Roger is the epitome of the word "groundskeeper." He is a self-made man who learned "on the job" from both his grandfather and his father. He entered the field quite young, attended some college, and set his sites on becoming head groundskeeper when his father retired.

Proof of Roger's dedication is the new Comiskey Park. Several years of study and testing went into the park. The drainage system was developed and patented by Roger. I remember visiting him in the late 1980's and attending a game. Roger came to me at the end of the 3rd inning and led me under the stands and through the tunnels at the old park to his research lab. At the time, he was experimenting with several sand rootzones and drainage systems trying to determine the best soil medium and drainage to use in the new stadium field. He also sought input from his closest friends and colleagues to reaffirm his decision. The result was a field that gives Roger pride. He says, "We get 2 inches of rain and we're playing within a half hour with no standing water." A wet spring and near record rainfall in 1994 was a real challenge that kept Roger and his 24-person grounds crew on guard. But, the new field pulled through.

Besides maintaining Comiskey Park, Roger is involved with the White Sox spring training fields in Sarasota, Florida. In 1998, the Sox will be moving to a new complex in Tucson, Arizona, that Roger has been involved in. In addition, he has worked with the St. Louis Cardinals new field at Busch Stadium where he recommended a new selection of common bermudagrass, "Quick Stand," developed at the University of Kentucky by Dr. A. J. Powell. He has also been consulting with the Cleveland Indians, New York Yankees, Seattle Mariners, Tampa Bay Devil Rays and the Phoenix Diamond Backs.

Through all the years I have known Roger, I have been greatly impressed with his achievements and with him as a friend and a person. I find him to be a hard working, humble and friendly individual who strives for the very best through reading and seeking advice from his closest friends and colleagues. When it comes to manicuring a baseball field, he's one of the best. What impresses me most about Roger is that he is carrying on the great Bossard tradition and legacy to the next level. Keep up the fine standards you have set for yourself and the sports turf profession, Roger. You have many friends who appreciate your dedication and professional ethics.

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