

Doc's Dugout - An Inning from our Past & Present

by Dr. Kent Kurtz - STMA Historian

WRIGLEY FIELD - A NOSTALGIC JOURNEY INTO THE FRIENDLY CONFINES

In 1984, I was invited to Wrigley Field - not to watch a game - but to see the field and to meet with Lubie Veal, who at that time was the assistant director of stadium operations. Lubie had spent time in the Montreal and Cincinnati organizations before coming to the Chicago Cubs. Dallas Green was the executive vice-president and general manager who hired Lubie. Frank Capparelli was the supervisor of stadium facilities and Roger O'Connor was the working foreman who directed the grounds crew and made sure the field was prepared for games. Since my initial visit, Lubie and Frank have retired, Dallas Green went to the New York Mets and may have since retired, and Roger has passed away.

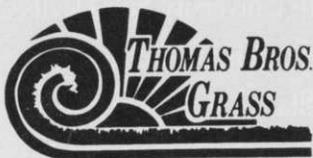
When I was a youngster growing up in the Chicago area, I went to games at Wrigley Field with my parents or groups from school. Never did I imagine at that time that I would be involved with sports turf and be able to walk on the field where immortal and legendary

heroes of the past, such as Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Honus Wagner, Mel Ott, Jimmy Foxx and many others had once trod. The field has not changed much since the Cubs played their first game there on April 20, 1916, except for the installation of the lights in 1988. Only two other ball parks are older than Wrigley Field, Tiger Stadium in Detroit, and Fenway Park in Boston, both of which began operations in 1912.

Early History

The first baseball game was played at Wrigley Field on April 23, 1914. In those days, the field was known as Weeghman Park and was the home of the Chicago Whales, a Federal League team that went out of business two years later. Weeghman Park was built for a sum of \$250,000 and held 14,000 fans. It required 490 men to build the park - 350 were involved in building the structure and 140 landscape specialists from the George

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Wittbold Florist Company were employed to haul in 4,000 cubic yards of topsoil, install a drainage system (which still works) and to plant 4 acres of Kentucky bluegrass turf. The name of the field was changed to Cubs Park in 1918, and then to Wrigley Field in 1926. The park was double-decked in 1928, and for opening day, 46,000 fans jammed into the park. Over 10,000 watched the game standing along the edge of the field. The large center field scoreboard was constructed in 1937 and continues today to be the only one in the major leagues to be operated by hand. In 1938, a young Bill Veeck (later owner of the Chicago White Sox) left his mark in the friendly confines. Veeck purchased ivy and bittersweet from "Clavey's Corners" and with the aid of Bob Dorr (Park Superintendent) and Cotton Bogren (clubhouse boy and later groundskeeper) ran copper wire up and down the walls and strung the ivy and bittersweet on the brick facade. Each spring, when the ivy comes out of its winter dormancy and greens the brick walls, baseball season has already begun. Until August, 1988, Wrigley Field was the only ball park in the major leagues without lights.

It is interesting to note that in 1941, when night games had become commonplace in major league baseball, the Wrigley family was about to give in to the trend. They purchased the bulbs, wiring, fixtures and had steel fabricated for the light standards. However, when Pearl Harbor was attacked and we went to war, all the lighting equipment was given to the war effort and the lights were never installed.

In the next issue: A look at the modern era at the "friendly confines".

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Q: What do all of these teams have in common?

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University of Texas Longhorns
San Diego Chargers
University of Southern California Trojans
California Angels
Arizona State University Sun Devils
San Francisco 49'ers
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