I had the privilege of meeting Roger Baird recently, prior to the September 11, 1998, game with the Milwaukee Brewers. Baird credits his skills and knowledge to the man who trained him, Roger O’Conner. O’Conner was his close friend, role model and his father away from home.

Roger has made some changes during his short tenure as Head Groundskeeper. He instituted a split crew - one group for general field maintenance and the other for home games. Since the Wrigley Field scoreboard is operated manually, three members of his crew are assigned to that duty during the games and one crew member works in the press box and operates the balls, strikes and outs on the scoreboard. The remaining home game grounds crew drags the infield skin areas and changes the bases after the 5th inning.

In 1995, the field was heavily infested with nutsedge. It was fumigated to eradicate the nutsedge and the entire field was resodded during the fall of 1995 with big roll sod. Roger has instituted striped mowing patterns. He uses Kankakee River clay on the infield areas along with a small percentage of sand and calcined clay. The exact percentage of these three ingredients varies with conditions, weather and use. The field is fertilized at least 7 times per year. Fungicides are applied when disease symptoms are present.

Junipers have been planted in the center field area to create a green background so batters can see the ball more accurately. Prior to this, that area had been a green tarp or concrete. The junipers do create more work since they need to be watered in the summer 2 to 3 times per week with soaker hoses.

I came away from the old ball park feeling great - after all - Sammy Sosa hit his 59th home run and I met a new friend, Roger Baird.

In the next issue: A look at the history of night baseball and the job of designing and installing the lights at Wrigley Field to match the architecture of the old ballpark.