

DOC'S DUGOUT - An Inning From Our Past

By Dr. Kent Kurtz - STMA Historian

The Field - Through the Eyes of a Player, Broadcaster & Manager

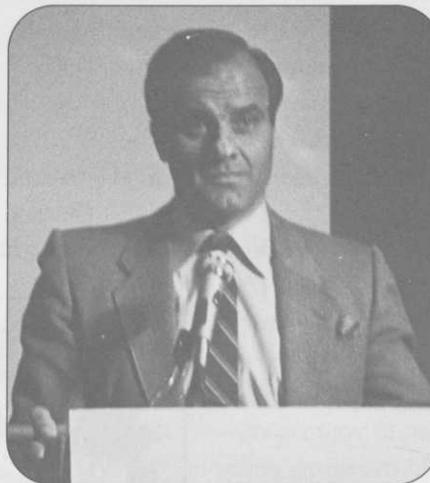
Joe Torre, current manager of the New York Yankees, gave a wonderful presentation at the STMA Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona in 1987. His presentation, "Sports Turf Management Through the Eyes of a Player, Manager and Broadcaster" was delivered while he was the California Angels broadcaster, a position he held between managerial jobs. Following are excerpts from his presentation.

What impact do sports turf managers have on the game of baseball? Do they help the home team? A good sports turf manager very definitely is an advantage to the home team in baseball. "It has been said that some ball clubs have 10 men on the field, the 10th person being the groundskeeper." Let's look at a few instances -

1960 World Series - The Pittsburgh Pirates vs. the New York Yankees. Bill Virdon of the Pirates hits a double play ball to Yankee shortstop Tony Kubek and the ball jumps up and hits Tony in the throat. Guess who the home team was? Right, the Pirates and they went on to win the World Series 4 games to 3, thanks in part to Bill Mazeroski's home run. However, without the diligent work of the Pittsburgh groundskeeper who placed that small stone in the infield, Mazeroski may never have had the opportunity to hit that home run.

Rivalry - The San Francisco Giants vs. the Los Angeles Dodgers. This rivalry was and still is a great one and especially during the days of the great base stealer, Maury Wills. The ground crew at Dodger stadium kept the infield soil hard which was conducive to the speed on the base paths for Wills. However, when the Dodgers played the Giants at Candlestick Park in San Francisco, the ground crew at Candlestick would soak the infield dirt to neutralize the running ability of Maury Wills, and it worked.

Philadelphia Phillies - When the Phillies played baseball in old Connie Mack Stadium there were numerous rainouts because of the field. Veteran's Stadium was built with synthetic turf to replace the old field, and in 1971, our St. Louis Cardinals played the Phillies in an extra inning game on a rainy Sunday. In the top of the 15th inning we scored 5 runs to take the lead and then it started to rain. It was ironic because when the rain stopped we learned that the ground crew member that operated the



Joe Torre at the STMA Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, 1987

Zambonie machine to remove the water from the field had gone home with the key. The game was suspended erasing all of our runs. It's no wonder Richie Allen of the Phillies once said, "if a horse won't eat it, I don't want to play on it, or if you can't smoke it, I don't want it."

Wrigley Field - Chicago - When I

managed, I recall one day at Wrigley Field how finely manicured the infield had been prepared by the ground crew. Apparently my pitchers didn't want to mess up this finely manicured infield, so they got the Cub hitters to hit the ball up in the air with the wind blowing out - it was home run weather.

Maintenance of baseball fields is extremely important and this begins with Little League Baseball. The field standards should be like players; consistent. Teaching baseball to youngsters at a very early age is so much easier if the field they play on is maintained properly. With good field maintenance, kids learn to trust the hop of the ball and this develops good fundamentals and work habits.

It only takes one bad experience from a ball that bounces up and hits a youngster in the face or mouth from a poorly maintained field to permanently scar a young player. That young player will remember that incident and be afraid of ground balls, sometimes forever.

Recognition for those who maintain and care for baseball fields is long overdue. However, recently recognition for those individuals who have done an exceptional job, who have been concerned for the safety of the players and those who are dedicated to their profession has begun to emerge. Several individuals here tonight such as Roger Bossard (Chicago White Sox), David Frey (Cleveland Indians), Harry Gill (Milwaukee Brewers), Ed Miller

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(New York Yankees - Ft. Lauderdale), Dale Sandin (Baltimore Orioles - Miami), John Liburdi (Albany-Yankees), and Sam Newpher (Atlanta Braves) are dedicated men and interested in making their profession better for others who may follow them. (Positions held in 1987.)

The Sports Turf Managers Association is going to be the driving force behind the improvement and maintenance of field surfaces throughout the country. STMA's purpose of educating its members is to be commended. Finally as a player, broadcaster and manager, one's job requires thorough preparation and the willingness to invest quality time. Please remember this one thought, "people forget how fast you do a job,

but they remember how well you did the job, so take pride in whatever you do".

Joe Torre started as a catcher, first baseman and third baseman with the Milwaukee Braves and Atlanta Braves (1960-68), with the St. Louis Cardinals (1969-74) and the New York Mets (1975-77). He also managed the New York Mets (1977-81) and the Atlanta Braves (1982-84). He was a broadcaster with the California Angels before being selected as the manager of the New York Yankees where he distinguishes himself today.

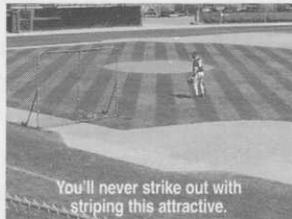
On the playing field he had a lifetime batting average of .297. He was the National League's batting champion with an average of .363 in 1971 with the St. Louis Cardinals and that same year he was voted the National League's most valuable player.



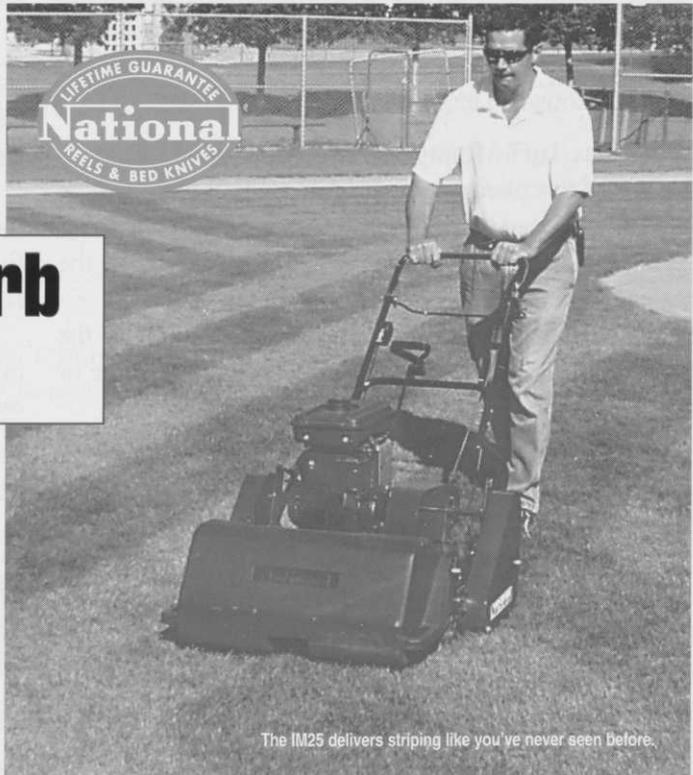
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