

## MIDWEST BREEZES

Charles Anfield, CGCS, *Heritage Bluffs Golf Course*



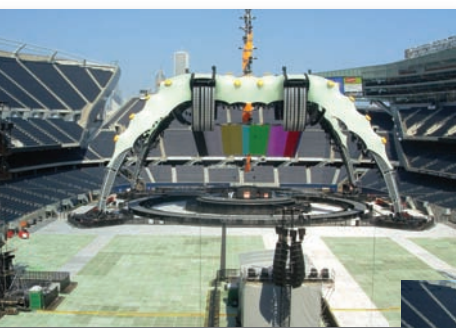
### Shake, Rattle, Hum and Sod

What does a U2 concert, the Chicago Park District and the Chicago Bears have in common? If you guessed playing at Soldier Field, you would be right. You probably all saw the TV coverage concerning the turf situation at Soldier Field. Here's the inside story.

I play golf with Paul Carlson on Wednesday nights out at Blackberry Oaks Golf Club in the Fox Valley Golf League. He has been the Sales Director for Central Sod, in Naperville since 1977. He told me, "Chuck, you've got to check this out. We're re-sodding Soldier Field right after the U2 concert on Sunday night. We've got to have it ready for play on the next Sunday!" This, I had to see.

The U2-360 "kick off" for their World Tour ended on Sunday night (I heard it was a good show). The stage removal began immediately after. The massive stage extended out to

the 50 yard line. It took four cranes to remove the corners of the 360 stage. A ¼" thick aluminum plate was put down on top of the existing turf to support the stage. The work to remove the stage was around the clock. Even with a frantic pace, it took until Tuesday afternoon before it was finally removed. Now you have to remember, this stage was sitting on top of the existing turf for ten days. In addition, it had been pretty warm. Central Sod moved in Monday to remove the sod on the non stage end of the field. Tuesday night they began removing the sod where the stage sat. They were under the gun to remove and replace all of the turf on the field prior to the Sunday Bear game. Paul described removing the dead decaying sod under the stage as, "50 yards of ass". It did not hold together well during the removal and as you can imagine was quite odiferous.



Mon.



Wed.

Sun.



Tue.



I met Paul down on the field Friday morning. They were putting the final big rolls into place and hand cutting some of the edges. It's a process Central Sod likes to call "instant Replay". The sod is cut and laid the same morning, all within an hour and a half. Paul called it "ultra fresh". The benefit of the big roll sod is that each piece is 42" wide by 1.75" soil thickness and 30 feet long. After each roll is butted and tucked into the next and each piece is pushed firmly together, they don't move. Paul says it doesn't matter that it was laid only a few days before the game. The sod is never intended to root into the existing 8 inch sand base. The sand base also has an internal network of tubes with an antifreeze solution to keep the sod warm and actively growing when temperatures drop. All of the removed sod is recycled back into the Central fields. The Chicago Park District applies and receives LEED (Leader in Energy and Economic Development) credit as an energy efficient process. The trucks that haul the new sod in are the same trucks that haul the "junk" out. The process is 97% efficient. Everything had to come and go out of one tunnel. The sod is cut from Central's Marengo field. It is a two year old, five variety, Jacklyn blend of 100% Kentucky bluegrass. The soil base is 60% sand 40% soil. It has been grown specifically for the Bears.

The sod was being "lightly" watered. Paul was concerned that it needed more water as he didn't want it to bake out and expose the seams. I met Ken Mrock, Head Groundskeeper for the Bears and he was concerned that it may rain on Sunday and he wanted the turf to be more firm than soft, to be able to accept any potential rain on game day. There was a discussion, but no blows were exchanged.

I did my own turf "demo" and ran a few down and out routes on the field. It was firm and stable under foot. I imagined myself receiving a Jay Cutler pass and the crowd cheering as I made a first down. Ken will topdress with USGA specified sand and broom it in. He will then roll and mow to get the seams

to blend in a little better. Paint is applied for the field numbers and the Bears logo. The plan is to aerify the sod after the game. Ken will also over-seed the field with ryegrass. Ever see all those pigeons flying around Soldier Field? Now you know why. Paul indicated the reason for the topdressing is to allow the players feet to kick out and disperse the energy of the impact. Despite what people may say or think, the Bears are very concerned about the safety of the athletes. This explains why the field does not have carpeting instead of real grass. A recent NFL Survey indicated that 97% of the athletes prefer grass to carpet. There is just a lot less shock to the knees and ankles. If the turf pulls up a little, it's supposed to. Ever warm up on an artificial mat and hit one fat? Ouch. There's no give like there is when taking a divot on real grass. Even the new varieties of the thick, "good" carpet can't compare with real grass. Soldier Field will always be a multi use field and they prefer real grass as a playing surface. They are willing to sod the field as needed to provide a top quality playing surface. Although I am not an athlete, I am an athletic supporter and I may be biased, but there is nothing better than real grass. Go Bears.

I watched the next Bears game on TV and there was very little spoken about the grass. The Bears put a beat down on the Lions and Jay Cutler didn't blow his knee out, another victory for real grass. Paul says they may have to re-sod in November in between the hash marks if the field has excessive wear from some high school football games. Thanks Central Sod you get credit for the extra point.

Go Bears. **-OC**



Fri.



Sun.



Thu.



Sat.

