

Fenway's Facelift

Golf course builder rolls out new green carpet for World Series champs

Story and Photography
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T

o many, Fenway Park is the crown jewel of baseball stadiums, a time machine that transports its inhabitants to the early 1900s.

Now it is home to the world champion Boston Red Sox, a phrase thought by many never to be uttered in a thousand lifetimes.

But to Jerry Deemer, Fenway Park is simpler than that.

"It's like a big putting green," he says on an unseasonably warm November day as he stands along the right-field warning track in front of the visitor's bullpen.

It's not that Deemer is callous to the historic ballpark. It's just that he has built, restored or renovated 120 golf courses as owner of Country Golf Inc., based in Traverse City, Mich. Shortly after the World Series, Deemer was hired to renovate Fenway's turf according to a plan by Roger Bossard, a baseball field construction guru whose company has built the playing field portion for eight of the last 12 Major League ballparks constructed.

On this day, with drain lines in various states of installation, the hallowed ground does in fact look like a putting green

Soon after the Red Sox won the World Series, the field at the club's historic stadium was renovated by Jerry Deemer, a golf course builder from Traverse City, Mich.

under construction. The fact remains that the installation of drainage and irrigation in Fenway is remarkably similar to a golf course.

Bossard, a graduate of Purdue with an agronomics degree, is also a United States Golf Association consultant. Under Bossard's patented construction plan, 6,000 cubic yards of topsoil was first removed at Fenway. The only thing remaining was the warning track, which the Fenway grounds crew will most likely build in late winter. The track was used as a road for the heavy equipment.

Then drainage was laid but on a larger scale than what Deemer was accustomed to on some of the world's great layouts. Six-inch tiles spaced 15 feet apart were connected into 8-inch mains.

Fabric was first put down in the trenches, followed by a 1-inch layer of stone and the drain tile. The lines were then filled with crushed stone and the field — except for the base paths,

pitching mound and warning track — was covered in 4 inches of stone. That same area was capped with 8 inches of straight sand.

Because the subgrade at Fenway is not level, Deemer attempted to rectify the situation as much as he could. Instead of laser-leveling Fenway into three sections, as he would normally do, he broke it down into 10. According to Deemer, Fenway is highest in center field and drops off to right and left fields with up to 4 inches of change. That has been reduced down to about 2 inches. The pitch should not be noticeable to players.

A bluegrass mix made up of four varieties specific to athletic fields was the final step. The new irrigation system is by The Toro Co. A sub-air system was also installed.

The entire project was done in slightly more than two weeks, lowering the field by about 2 inches. Shortly after completion, Fenway was hit with two rainstorms within just a few days that dumped a considerable amount of water on the field. Unlike in the past when those events would have surely led to flooding, not so this time. "Everything went off without a hitch, and we're excited about next year," Deemer says.

A third-generation big-league groundskeeper, Bossard has been building or rebuilding fields for more than 15 years since redoing Yankee Stadium at George Steinbrenner's request.

Bossard's portfolio includes fields in Milwaukee, Arizona, Seattle, Detroit and St. Louis. His talent has also taken him to Saudi Arabia, where he has built athletic fields, the first in that nation, for the royal family.

At Fenway, Bossard also became a bit of an archeologist. His crew uncovered old soda and perfume bottles as well as the goal post supports from the days Fenway hosted college and pro football games.

Dave Mellor, Fenway's director of grounds, says the old field was a clay/loam mix that drained poorly and was severely crowned. He and his staff also had to water by hand. "We were the only team in the majors not to have an automatic irrigation system," Mellor says.

Fenway was Deemer's second ball field. He also was involved with the building of a park in Manchester, N.H., that is home to the New Hampshire Fisher Cats, the AA Eastern League affiliate of the Toronto Blue Jays.

"I'm so used to working without anything



permanent," Deemer says, noting that he's more accustomed to the openness on golf courses and not working within structures. Glancing up at the fabled Green Monster, Deemer says, "This is so cut and dry."

Bossard will also have Deemer as subcontractor when his company rebuilds RFK Stadium for the inaugural season of the Washington Nationals.

Deemer was obviously enjoying the Fenway project, even though he has worked on a number of courses that hosted men's and women's major tournaments.

"After more than 100 golf courses, it's hard for me to find a course to get excited about, but everyone knows Fenway Park," he says.

Deemer and his crew also got to enjoy the fruits of the Sox success. They had their photograph taken with the World Series Trophy and were in the background working while Barbara Walters interviewed Curt Schilling.

"That was cool," Deemer says. ■

Fenway Park might look in disarray in this photograph. But believe it or not, the renovation project took only a little more than two weeks to complete. Below, Roger Bossard (right) and Jerry Deemer confer about the project.

