



Lambeau lawn becomes larger than life: *Tales from "Title Town"*

By Norman Ray, Superintendent, Crystal Springs Golf Course

Editor's Note: We didn't have to go far to find the perfect article for this feature in this issue. Nothing has so occupied the Wisconsin sports scene like the Packers' 1996 season and 1997 Super Bowl victory since the Badgers won the 1993 Big 10 title and the 1994 Rose Bowl.

A big piece of the news during the playoffs involved the resodding of Lambeau Field in January. A WGCSA member donated his time—two days—and then wrote about his experience in the last issue of The Wisconsin Turfgrass News. In case you missed it, Norm Ray's article is reprinted here with permission.

I'm the golf course superintendent at Crystal Springs Golf Course which is about 15 miles west of Green Bay. My home is in Green Bay and like everyone else, we have suffered through the trials, tribulations and struggles of the Packers over the years. Also like everyone else, we have been sharing in the recent excitement of the past few seasons.

I heard they were planning on resodding the field after the rain drenched game with the 49ers on Saturday, January 4, 1997, that destroyed the turf. Who would have ever thought turfgrass and sod would be front page stories in newspapers throughout the midwest? I saw on the local TV station that some people were just walking into Lambeau to volunteer themselves towards the effort. Well, I decided this would be a



Field supervisor, Todd Edlebeck, rolling the sod.



The sod has yet to be laid where the tarp is located.

once in a lifetime adventure to also volunteer and felt I would be doing my part for the Packers (and all turf-minded Packer fans everywhere). On Wednesday morning I headed over to Lambeau Field.

After a brief conversation with a guard I walked down onto the field. First of all, it was exciting and inspiring just to take in the aura of the stadium. There was an energy in the air. Crews had already removed about half the sod from the field. My first impression was wondering how the job was ever going to get done for the game on Sunday. I wandered around for awhile until I spotted Todd Edlebeck, the field supervisor at Lambeau. I introduced myself and asked if I could help. Todd is a very competent, likable guy who reminds me of a mini Mike Holmgren. He introduced me to the person in charge of the resodding, Jack Kidwell. So, I was on my way.

The project was under the direction of Jack from Duraturf Services Corporation, a sod company from Richmond, Virginia along with Chip Toma from the National Football League, and Todd's crew. Chip was marching around the field. He, Jack and Todd reminded me of generals on a battlefield as we engaged in our war against bad sod!

I felt sorry for the crew from Virginia which consisted of only 11 people. They were really bundled up. The temperature was only in the teens but I didn't hear any complaints about the cold. The rest of the sodding crew consisted of about 10-15 volunteers. One was a high school teacher from Virginia who called the sod company on Monday morning and had 45 minutes to pack up to

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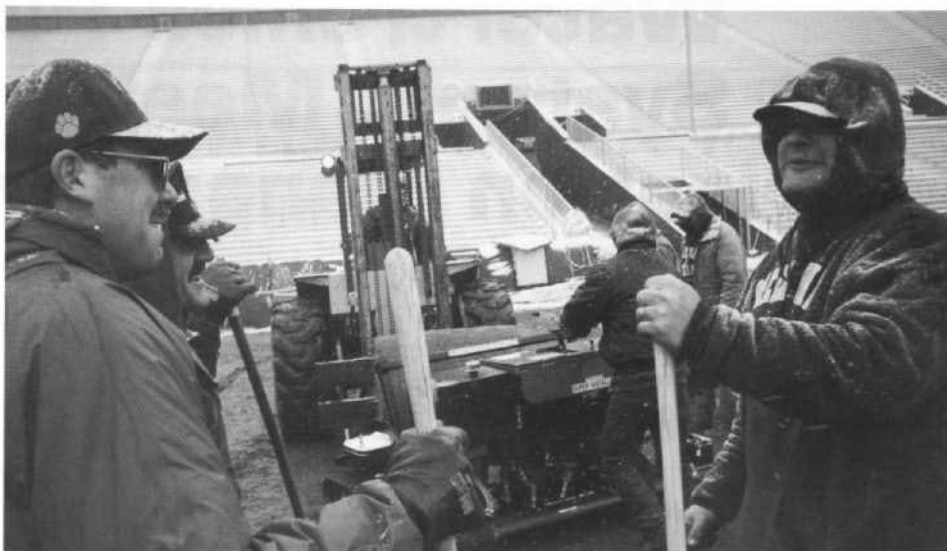
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come with them. Another one was a 55 year old retired General Motors worker from Janesville who also had an urge to come and be part of sports history. The crew was a mixture of characters who were quite good workers too. I met Randy Witt, superintendent from Oneida Golf and Riding Club in Green Bay, who was there during both days of the resodding. He was delivering his special mix of topsoil for low spots on the field.

The old sod was really a swampy mess. It had been dyed green but still was showing good signs of life. After the old sod was cut using a sod cutter, they used skid steer loaders to carry it to the parking lot where people were picking it up for souvenirs! Later they had to station a guard there to protect it.

The new sod was 2 inches thick, 42 inches wide and in 48 foot long rolls. It was a pure bluegrass stand grown in what looked like a clay and silt soil. The field itself looked like a silt loam soil. From what I heard there is no drainage system within the field. It is just crowned along the center shedding water to the sidelines, hopefully! The heating coils are buried 6-7 inches below ground. Some of the coils, near the visitors side, were not working very well and they had a hard time cutting the old sod in that area.

The new sod was laid using a small machine on rubber tracks that lifted a roll of sod and then unrolled it. The hard part came in making a tight fit between the pieces. We used what they called "tater forks" (potato) to snag the sod and pull it tight. Four to five people would get on one side pulling with the tater forks and four to five on the other side pushing with gravel rakes. We moved down the sod length doing about 10 feet at a time. Each sod piece had to be fitted just like we do on the golf course except that these pieces each weighed over a ton! The wet soil acted like glue underneath. It was not an easy task. With two crews fitting the sod, we were able to lay one row from end zone to end zone in about 15 minutes. The total job of laying the sod took two days. There was some patching that had to be done where the sod was thinned out or where rocks showed up. Afterward, a roller was used to firm the sod to the underlying soil and then the cover was put over it.



Some happy volunteers behind the sod laying machine.

It was not a perfect field. That would have been impossible to do in such a short time. It was a good field though and from what I saw during the game it held up really well. John Madden never showed up on the field but we did see him wildly gesturing up in one of the press boxes late on Thursday afternoon. Some of the players and Coach Holmgren took a quick peek on Wednesday.

Being a part of all this was fun, but also very hard work. I occasionally would ask myself, "What am I doing here?" Every muscle in my body was sore on Friday. But, I felt like I was contributing to part of sports history. There was good camaraderie among the crews along with a real sense of being on a mission; a war against bad sod! After all that work, Todd said the sod will all



Norm Ray, the author, experiencing the moment.

be taken out and redone again next season because there was too much clay in the sod mix. I had heard reports that the entire project cost between \$100,000 and \$150,000. That's a pretty expensive sod job for one day's use, but worth it. GO PACKERS!! 🍷

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