

# Doc's Dugout - An Inning from our Past & Present

by Dr. Kent Kurtz - STMA Historian

## WRIGLEY FIELD - (PART II)

When the decision was made to replace the Kentucky bluegrass turf at Wrigley Field in the mid 1980's, I was asked to assist the grounds crew in selecting the new sod for the field. I was Executive Director of STMA at that time and saw the opportunity at Wrigley Field as a way for STMA to become better known.

In August of 1985, Lubie Veal, Frank Capparelli, Roger O'Conner and I set off to visit sod farms in northern Illinois and Indiana. After visiting four sod farms, we stopped for lunch and a discussion of what we had seen. We considered the quality of the sod, the varieties of bluegrass that made up the sod blend, the soil on which the sod was grown and how well it would match the Wrigley Field soil, and the delivery and service of each source. It was their decision to purchase the sod from Evergreen Sod Farm (an STMA member) and, coincidentally, the sod used by their counterparts, Harry Gill at Milwaukee, and Roger Bossard at White Sox Park.

Under the direction of Head Groundskeeper, Roger O'Conner, maintenance of the Wrigley Field turf and grounds was intensified and modern technology instituted. Once the

new sod was installed the improved Kentucky bluegrass cultivars required additional nutrition, care and grooming. Slow release fertilizers were applied, a new automatic irrigation system was installed, aerification was instituted, calcined clay was worked into the infield skin areas, and a new mower was purchased so mowing patterns could be seen. Other projects also were undertaken.

O'Conner became ill and died suddenly in August of 1995. Although Roger never joined STMA, he was a supporter of the Association and conducted a clinic on preparation of pitching mounds at one of the STMA sponsored regional conferences and field days at the College of Dupage in the late 1980's. He also welcomed sports turf managers who were interested in the field and his maintenance program.

Following Roger O'Conner's death, a member of the Chicago Cubs grounds crew, Roger Baird, was asked to fill in as the Head Groundskeeper for the remainder of the season. Baird had worked closely with O'Conner since joining the grounds crew in 1978. He was promoted to the top spot in 1996.

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## Doc's Dugout

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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.*

## Headquarters Staff Expanding

Trusty & Associates has added two new employees to assist us in assisting YOU.

Angela Collinson has been hired as Office Manager. Angela will be doing most of the data entry for STMA memberships, bookkeeping, invoicing, etc. Angela has worked previously as a receptionist, tax secretary, and for the US Postal Service. She is married and has two sons, ages 15 and 10.

Jaci Pettie is our new Operations Coordinator. She will be in charge of most of the filing, faxing, mailing and general organization. Jaci is a single mother with 4 children ranging in age from 18 to 11. She brings with her great organizational skills from 11 years experience in her previous position.

We welcome both our new employees and hope you will too.

**Q: What do all of these teams have in common?**

Oakland A's  
Arizona Diamondbacks  
University of Texas Longhorns  
San Diego Chargers  
University of Southern California Trojans  
California Angels  
Arizona State University Sun Devils  
San Francisco 49'ers  
San Diego State University Aztecs  
San Francisco Giants  
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Los Angeles Dodgers  
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