

DOC'S DUGOUT - An Inning From Our Past

By Dr. Kent Kurtz - STMA Historian

Lubie Veal - One of the Last of the Early Groundskeepers

A New Era Dedicated to Building New Tradition

Lubie Veal was born in Kentucky in 1924. Once he finished school he worked for several years at a clothing store in Murray, Kentucky. In the mid 1960's he went to Richmond, Virginia, to visit a friend who had a connection with the Richmond Braves. While in Richmond, Lubie asked if he could assist the head groundskeeper with the field at the stadium and was given a job on the grounds crew. A couple of years later he moved on to work for the Louisville Colonels. In 1969, another friend went to Montreal to work for the expansion team - the Montreal Expos - and asked Lubie to come along to train the new grounds crew. Lubie agreed to spend four weeks training the new crew but ended up spending four years. He left in 1972 for the challenge of building a new field in Daytona Beach, Florida (now Jackie Robinson Stadium).

Once the field was completed, he interviewed with the Cincinnati Reds Baseball Club for a better paying, full-time position. In 1972, Lubie was hired by the Reds as their Turfgrass Superintendent and remained with them for 10 years. Each ball club Lubie worked for sent him to spring training to get the fields ready for the exhibition season. These included all practice facilities and the stadium where spring training games are played.

In 1982, when Dallas Green came from the Philadelphia Phillies to assume the position of Executive Vice-President and General Manager of the Chicago Cubs, he encouraged Lubie to leave the Cincinnati Reds and come to the Cubs as Assistant Director/Stadium Operations at Wrigley Field. In this position he was responsible for overseeing the grounds crew and the stadium operations crews. This he did with distinction as the Cubs entered a new era of building a new tradition.

Although Lubie officially retired in 1990, he continues to serve the Chicago Cubs organization as a special advisor to the spring training complex in Mesa, Arizona, where he "keeps an eye" on STMA member Hoke Holyoak and assists him with his work with the City of Mesa. In addition, he looks after sites at Daytona Beach, Florida; Lansing, Michigan; Jackson, Tennessee; Boise, Idaho; and Des Moines, Iowa. At 76, Lubie maintains his vigor and positive attitude as he continues to work at what he loves - making sure the fields within the organization are properly established and maintained.

When asked about some memorable events Lubie related to me the following:

"When I was with Cincinnati, manager Sparky



Anderson wanted the front of home plate very soft so the pitches from sinker ball pitchers would die in the dirt rather than skip past the catcher."

"When Gene Mauch was the manager of the Montreal Expos, and when we played the St. Louis Cardinals, he wanted the infield dirt soaked more and longer to slow down the Cardinal runners and prevent

them from stealing too many bases on his pitching staff."

"When Joe Morgan played second base for the Cincinnati Reds he wanted hard clay put around the edges of the Astroturf® so his left foot wouldn't slip when he attempted to steal bases."

"When you (Doc) came to Wrigley Field in the fall of 1984 to help us select a new sod for the ball park, Dallas Green saw the four of us (Lubie, Frank Caparilli, Roger O'Conner and Doc Kurtz from STMA) off on a trip to visit sod farms in northern Illinois and Indiana. We spent the entire day visiting four sod farms as you drove us from place to place. After each place visited we would ask you what you thought and you would say, 'What do you think? It's your field and your grass, I'm just the driver and I don't think.' When we finished visiting all four sod farms and we stopped for lunch we again asked you who you thought had the best sod and the best service, etc. and you quizzed us once again and when we said probably the first place we stopped, you said 'That's where I would buy my sod if it were my stadium because they have a top quality product, will give excellent service, its free of Poa annua, and the grower is an STMA commercial member.' And when we said that we could have eliminated all the extra stops if we could have gotten an answer after the first stop, you said, 'It's your grass, your stadium, your decision and you have to learn to solve your own problems.' "Then I realized you were a true friend and wouldn't let us make a bad decision and you did this to force us to begin to depend on our decisions and have confidence in ourselves. And I knew then that the STMA group you and Harry Gill were promoting really was there for us, to provide us with help, guidance, education and friendship."

