

Pennant Winning Turf

Historical Detroit and Chicago fields prove inspirational to pennant winners.

by **Ron Hall**, assistant editor and **Kent Kurtz**, professor of Horticulture, California Polytechnic Institute, Pomona, CA



Wrigley Field —one of the oldest and most respected baseball fields in the country.

Tiger Stadium

Millions watched the virtuoso performance of the Detroit Tigers in the World Series, but the name Frank Feneck, assistant director of stadium operations at Tiger Stadium, is hardly a household word.

"We're here for the Tigers. We're not here for the people to say, 'Oh, what a beautiful turf you have,'" the pragmatic Feneck, chief of the stadium's groundskeeping force, says.

Feneck is uncomfortable with the publicity his profession sometimes generates.

"When I don't hear from the ball-players I know I'm doing a fine job," he says.

The criticism of San Diego's Jack Murphy Stadium during the Series elicits a sympathetic response from Feneck. "I hate to hear complaining about their field," he says. "No matter what they do, they're going to lose because they share the field with a football team. We only have to worry about the Tigers. That's why I sometimes hate to hear compliments about our field."

Maintaining Tiger Stadium is a snap compared to what it was before the NFL Lions moved to the Pontiac Silverdome in 1974, Feneck, a native Detroit claims.

"We used to carry about 18,000 yards of sod," he says. "Now it's like

handling a loaf of bread compared to what we used to do. When you don't have football and baseball combined, you're not in bad shape."

Feneck feels adequate irrigation is the key to maintaining good athletic turf. "If you've got the team home for two or three weeks, you just try to make the grass survive until the team goes on the road and then you flood it," Feneck explains. "I'd say most of keeping good grass is water. I like to water twice a day in July and August."

A five-year-old, underground Rain-bird sprinkler system takes most of the work out of Tiger Stadium irrigation.

Feneck insists groundskeepers should have an excellent understanding of the sport they're dealing with ("I played baseball and I know what I liked") but the groundskeeper still won't please everyone.

"If you can get grass to grow in a minute," he sighs, "then you've got something."

Wrigley Field

A chill runs down any baseball fan's spine when he steps onto Chicago's Wrigley Field. The soil is the same trod by the immortal and legendary heroes of the past, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Honus Wagner, Mel Ott, Joe Dimaggio, Jimmy Foxx, and others.

The field has not changed much since the Cubs played their first National League game there on April 20, 1916. Only three other stadiums are older than Wrigley Field, Comiskey Park (Chicago, opened in 1910), Tiger Stadium (Detroit, 1912), and Fenway Park (Boston, 1912).

Wrigley history

The first baseball game was played at Wrigley Field on April 23, 1914. The field was named Weeghman Park in those days and was the home of the Chicago Whales, a Federal League team which went out of business two years later.

Weeghman Park was built for \$250,000 and accommodated 14,000 fans. Building the stadium required 490 men, 140 were employed by the George Wittbold Florist Company to haul in 4,000 cubic yards of soil and

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Frank Fenneck, chief groundskeeper of Tiger Stadium, left, and **Eddie Goward**.

plant four acres with Kentucky bluegrass seed, hand-collected from mid-western pastures.

The name of the field was changed to Cubs Park in 1918 and then to Wrigley Field in 1926. A second deck was added in 1928 allowing a capacity crowd of 46,000 fans to jam into the stadium. More than 10,000 spectators watched some games standing along the edge of the field.

The large centerfield scoreboard was constructed in 1937 and continues today to be the only scoreboard in the major leagues to be operated by hand.

Today, Wrigley Field seats 37,275 spectators, and only during the day since it is the only major league park without lights.

Lights were almost installed in 1941 when the Wrigleys purchased bulbs, wiring, fixtures, and steel light standards. But, when Pearl Harbor was attacked and the country went to war, all the lighting equipment was donated to the war effort.

Another tradition of Wrigley field is the Ivy Covered Walls. In 1938, a young Bill Veeck (later owner of the Chicago White Sox) purchased ivy and bittersweet from "Clavey's Corners" and with the aid of Bob Dorr (park superintendent) and Cotton Bogren (clubhouse boy) ran copper wire up and down the brick facade and strung the vines. Each spring the ivy comes out of winter dormancy just in time to begin a new and invigorating baseball season.

The new tradition

In 1980, the Cubs were purchased

from the Wrigley family by the Chicago Tribune and the entire baseball program was restructured.

Building a "new tradition" is an understatement, for they not only put together a winning ball club (the 1984 National League East Champions), but also changed the stadium and field management team, now headed by Lubie Veal, assistant director of stadium operations/facilities.

Veal brought to Chicago a positive attitude and broad experience from the previous National League baseball clubs. Lubie spent four years in Montreal, nine years with the Cincinnati Reds, and has just completed his third year with the Chicago Cubs. Everything he has learned about the management of sportsturf has been acquired through working long hours, trial and error, and a lot of hard work and energy.

Veal is the new breed of sports-turf manager; one who is willing to learn new ideas, attempt new techniques and try new products. He will listen to advice and seek suggestions to make his job easier and to enhance the playing surface.

When Dallas Green, executive vice president and general manager, came to Chicago from Philadelphia after the 1981 baseball season, he lured Veal away from the Cincinnati Reds to take over field maintenance. Upon his arrival in Chicago, Veal found most of the turf maintenance equipment in very poor condition. He convinced management that to perform his job correctly he needed to purchase \$70,000 worth of equipment. His

request was granted and he is now able to perform his maintenance responsibilities with an adequate arsenal of equipment.

All large equipment, such as a skid-steer loader, mowers, utility vehicle, tractor, sod cutter, roller, large drags, batting cages, and wheel barrows are stored under the left and center field bleachers. Adjacent to the Cub's third base dugout is a tool room where small hand tools, equipment and supplies are stored. Also located in this room is an adequate supply of moist clay used to repair the pitching mound and the home plate area, several sets of bases, small drags, hoses, shovels and rakes.

The stadium crew

Except on rainy days the stadium crew is rarely seen by spectators. It consists of 22 individuals, only five directly responsible for the playing field on a full-time basis.

Frank Capparelli is responsible for the crew who give the field the finishing touches prior to each game. Many of the crew have long service records, like Lenny Wheeler who began work in 1957. Cotton Bogren retired in 1982 after 47 years of service.

Einar Bogren, assistant supervisor of the field crew has worked at Wrigley Field for 24 years. Einar is responsible for the condition and upkeep of the field and the ivy.

Maintenance program

The soil in Wrigley Field consists of sandy loam which is well-drained and rich in organic matter. When the field was originally constructed, surface drainage was taken into consideration. To the novice the field looks flat; however, the infield slopes four inches from the base of the pitching mound to the infield grass and outfield slopes ten inches from center-field to each foul line.

The irrigation system was installed 40 years ago and utilizes quick coupler valves.

The field receives a minimum of five lbs. of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year. The nitrogen source is a combination of urea and methylene urea to assure both quick green-up and long term feeding. Fertilizer is applied in March, May, June, September, and October. An application of 2,4-D and MCPP is applied in May for broadleaf weeds and Dursban is applied in June to control grubs and sod webworms.

The field is not aerified, vertical

mowed or topdressed. Drags equipped with spikes (nails) are used twice yearly by pulling them through the turf with a tractor.

The infield is mowed every other day with a rotary mower set at approximately two inches. A lower height would not work because all the games are played during the daytime and stress on the infield grass would be apparent during a ball game (if mowed at one inch like many other major league ball parks). The outfield turf is mowed three times per week at 1½ to two inches using a triplex reel mower.

Specialized maintenance

Many of the jobs performed by the grounds crew may seem routine to the casual observer, but are really quite specialized.

Building the pitching mound is a slow, exacting process which requires six to eight hours according to Veal. The mound is built of clay layered in two-inch increments and tamped by hand until the mound is ten inches high and the sides and back taper to a

specific degree of slope.

For this and other purposes "green bricks" (not Kiln dry) are purchased from a brick yard, soaked for ten days, and then broken up into pieces. The pieces of moistened brick are placed in depressions and holes in and around the pitching mound and home plate areas and tamped down firmly.

The skinned areas in the infield contain a red clay and sand material purchased from the East Coast. The infield soil is used mostly for aesthetics but does aid drainage during wet weather.

During inclement weather and every evening when the Cubs are home, the infield is covered with a nylon laminated field tarp. Placing and removing the nylon field cover requires the help of the entire stadium crew. Whenever standing water accumulates on the skinned infield an aggregate known as Turface is used to absorb the moisture. As many as 50 50-lb. bags have been used to dry up wet spots on the infield during a single ballgame.

The foul lines in left and right fields are marked prior to each home game. A carbon dioxide (CO₂) charged sprayer containing a white latex field paint is used to apply the foul lines. To mark the batter's box at home plate a white, non-caustic chalk material is used.

Face lift

The summer of 1983 was extremely hot and dry and the old common Kentucky bluegrass turf was heavily infested with Fusarium blight. Immediately following the 1983 baseball season (October), the old Kentucky bluegrass turf was removed. After soil preparation, 108,000 square feet of an improved blend of Kentucky bluegrass was sodded in Wrigley Field. The new blend of Kentucky bluegrass included Adelphi, Touchdown, Majestic, Glade, and Ram I.

During the 1984 season the field turf looked exceptionally good. Perhaps the condition of the field had an impact on the team and helped create the new Chicago Cubs tradition.

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