

## Notre Dame, Penn State Proud of Their *ROOTS*

They don't design the plays and they don't write the schedules, but knowledgeable athletic field managers do their part to keep traditions alive.

by **Ron Hall**, assistant editor

Major universities so proud of their athletic traditions sometimes aren't eager to maintain the facilities, including their turf fields, that helped in building the legends; but at Rockne Stadium at the University of Notre Dame and Beaver Stadium at Penn State University they do.

Athletes at both locations have been playing on grass for generations, and it looks like they'll continue to do so thanks to experienced groundskeepers who care enough to

have established successful maintenance programs.

That's not the case everywhere.

The number of synthetic turf playing fields outnumber natural turf fields 56 to 48 in universities with Division 1-A football this season. Only Purdue in the Big Ten plays on grass, Missouri in the Big Eight. PAC-10 schools are split.

### **Notre Dame**

It's hot in South Bend, IN, so hot a pair

of ducks, oblivious to the campus foot traffic, treat themselves to the refreshing shower of a lawn sprinkler, but the most relaxing location on this mid-summer scorcher is Harold "Bennie" Benninghoff's office in the belly of the University of Notre Dame Stadium.

Benninghoff, literally working in the shadow of the famed Golden Dome, is comfortable in his role as keeper of the Fighting Irish turf. Easy going and resourceful, he goes about his job in a quiet, workmanlike manner.



"If you find something that works, why mess around with it?" Benninghoff says of his unsophisticated but practical maintenance program. It is the result of 20 years of tinkering at Notre Dame's Rockne Stadium where he's encountered everything from fusarium blight to the handiwork of over zealous Air Force partisans who initialed his stadium turf with a huge "AF" the fall of 1983.

In addition to Rockne Stadium, Benninghoff maintains approximately 40 acres of turf athletic fields and 24 tennis courts.

He's taking a breather after meeting with a Sherwin Williams rep concerning line marking paint to be used on an artificial surface practice football field. Benninghoff is seeking a paint that'll last forever. He's not convinced there is such a paint, but he's looking. Later in the day he'll be performing surgery on a sprinkler head decapitated by a wayward mower.

Benninghoff, in his own relaxed way, has tailored his program to fit his stadium's needs including application of Scott fertilizer (19-5-9) plus

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**—Benninghoff**

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fungicide on a periodic basis, aerification with a 3/4-in. spoons at least four times (the most compacted areas six times) annually, overseeding with a Jacobsen groove seeder, and the addition of soil conditioners about twice a year.

The field's surface is a mixture of Kentucky bluegrasses.

"Every time they come up with a new improved variety I try it," Benninghoff says. "There might be seven or eight varieties on it."

Problems? Nothing major.

"We're always fighting compaction like they are at other fields and we have had a grub problem, Japanese beetle and *aetenus spretulus*," he says, "so we watch and try to take preventative measures."

Installation of an underground Toro sprinkler system two years ago and the use of Rockne Stadium almost exclusively for football allows Ben-



**Harold Benninghoff**, keeper of the "Fighting Irish" turf.

ninghoff to keep his program on schedule.

### **Penn State program**

The stoop-shouldered hills of Central Pennsylvania are a patchwork quilt of fall color but fog smothers the valleys as coach Joe Paterno's Nittany Lions are just one day away from a loss to a struggling Crimson Tide in far-away Alabama. Bob Hudzik, the 30-year-old Penn State University groundskeeper—the experiment—stays home.

Home for him is either Beaver Stadium, the 80,000-plus seat monument to the storied Lions, or one of two Penn State golf courses. He's on the job early. He leaves late.

"I guess I was kind of an experiment," Hudzik says of the decision a few years back to put him in charge of what is a pretty sizable hunk of real estate in the Nittany Valley. "Usually in a case like this it's somebody that's come up through the ranks, but I guess they wanted to see if I could develop some new ideas."

Hudzik's responsibilities, in addition to Beaver Stadium and the two campus golf courses, include practice fields, recreation fields used for intermurals, tennis courts, and even low maintenance fields used for parking.

Originally from a small Western Pennsylvania community, the tall, thin Hudzik, a former Penn State stu-

dent, has put together and uses an athletic field renovation program that, according to an informal WTT survey, is gaining favor at other universities as well.

"There are no secrets," Hudzik says, "and we're doing nothing difficult. It's just a matter of getting on the fields and getting to work. Our program is very simple."

The Penn State program begins in the spring, as soon as workmen can get on the fields. It has to.

Early each summer hundreds of eager youngsters arrive at State College, PA, to participate in summer sports camps. The campus is host to three consecutive football camps, each with 750 to 800 students. That gives the grounds crew about three weeks from the end of intramural sports to the beginning of the camps to pull the athletic grounds back together.

Renovation of the turf at Beaver Stadium begins at this time also to dress up the stadium for graduation ceremonies. "When these students and their parents are here we want this field looking as good as we can so we can leave them with a good memory of the university," Hudzik notes.

Early April sees the application of 3/4 to one pound of 18-5-9 fertilizer per 1,000 sq. ft. with a tractor drawn cyclone spreader. An application of straight urea provides a quick greenup.

Then Hudzik sees to it that athletic fields are practically riddled with an Arien rennovator with 3/4 tines. The fields are aerified at least eight times, the stadium turf 10 times.

### **Aerification vital**

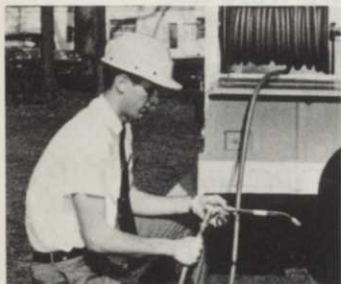
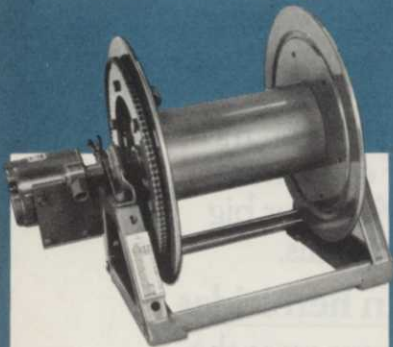
"If somebody asked me, 'what are the most important things you do to your fields?' I'd say aerification and phosphorus," Hudzik says. "Get the damn fields aerified. Sure, it would be nice if you could aerify in the fall too, but a lot of the time you just can't do it then."

A chainlink drag mat is used to smooth the soil churned up by the repeated aerifications.

"People sometimes say to me, 'well, I aerify and I still have problems'," Hudzik adds. "Maybe what they're doing is slicing. You've got to remove a core to allow the soil around the hole to collapse. If you have the time to let the field recover, just aerify the daylight out of it. It might scare you, but if you have a good overseeding program, you



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shouldn't have any problem at all."

Hudzik says not to underestimate phosphorus either. His fields receive two pounds per 1,000 sq. ft. of triple super phosphate in late May.

"Phosphorus is essential. I would use it in a renovation process even if we weren't low on phosphorus. It's been proven that you can establish a good, healthy stand of grass much quicker with it. It's essential particularly in developing a good root system," he points out.

When overseeding, Hudzik believes it's best to work in a crossing pattern.

Using a groove seeder a mixture of three Kentucky bluegrasses (Baron, Fylking, and Touchdown) and two perennial ryes (Pennfine and Manhattan) is applied in one direction, then Touchdown blue is sown perpendicular to the first mixture.

"Even on the football practice field I try to get the bluegrass established because it'll take more of a beating," Hudzik says, "but we know we don't have enough time to get bluegrass established on the intermural fields so we're putting a little extra rye on them."

It's just after overseeding that a lot of the thatch is removed from the stadium turf, last spring three dump truck loads. "The field's thin," Hudzik admits. "It looks like a piece of swiss cheese, but it's got all summer to recover."

Bare areas on the stadium floor are hydromulched ("if we put seed in it, it's very little") to keep moisture in and to prevent crusting which may

hamper the emergence of grass seedlings.

The Beaver Stadium turf gets a rest after graduation. It's mowed three times weekly, watered as-needed, and treated with insecticides and fungicides "on a curative basis." For weed control Hudzik mixes 1 pound 2,4-D, .55 pound MCP, and .10 pound of Diacamba.

Early October sees the Beaver Stadium turf receiving another shot of nitrogen, but Hudzik says he's careful not to overdo it.

"You can make a field look super but when it comes to football you

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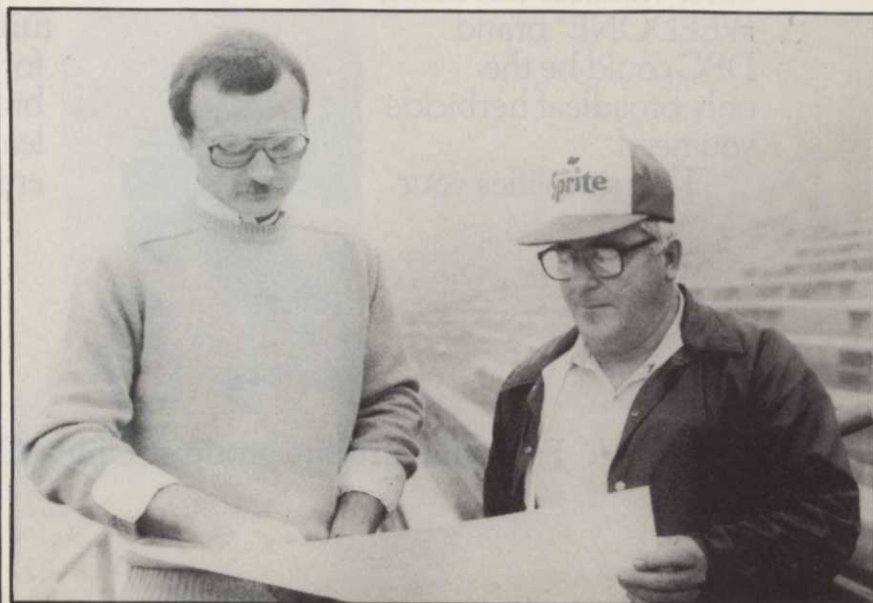
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**—Hudzik**

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don't want a super, lush growth. Those succulent grass blades will tear," he explains. "You want it to look good, but also you want the best playing conditions. You don't want to combine excess nitrogen and warm weather."

Taking care of Beaver Stadium might be Hudzik's showcase, but he doesn't see it as "any big deal." Getting his renovation program under way each spring is. **WT&T**



Bob Hudzik, and assistant Fred Sweeley of Beaver Stadium.