

AN OLD MASTER

Harry Wilcox uses the knowledge of more than half-a-century in the turf business to help save teenaged knees and ankles in Pennsylvania. He works his magic like the old master he is.

by Jerry Roche, editor

Turf consultant Harry O. Wilcox has celebrated the ninetieth anniversary of his birth. He is hard of hearing and slow of foot. But a soil probe in his hands is like a sip from the Fountain of Youth.

One day not long ago, Wilcox spryly raised the trusty custom-made probe over his head and thrust it into a small bare spot on the varsity football practice field at Warren (Pa.) High School.

"Look at that," he told a handful of observers. "That's good, loose topsoil. I've been on fields where my probe bounces right off the ground."

Wilcox takes particular interest in Warren's practice field. The cultural

practices used on the field are the same ones he suggested for Upper Merion (Pa.) High School more than 20 years ago.

John "Toby" Shea, then varsity football coach at Warren, read a June, 1965 article in *Athletic Journal*, entitled "Safer Athletic Fields." Its author was Harry O. Wilcox.

Wilcox moved to Warren in 1979 and met Shea one day in 1980, a copy of "Safer Athletic Fields" in his hand.

"I'm familiar with that article," noted Shea. "I'm glad to meet the author. We've been trying to follow the practices the article describes since I first read it."

When Wilcox and county extension agent Bernie Wingert first inspected Warren's practice field (at Shea's request), they had few suggestions.

"Harry and Bernie recommended we put tile down because we had a bad drainage problem," remembers Shea. "So we tiled along a bank next to the field and along the outside of the track's straightaway on the other side. We now also have six-inch tiles along the inside of the entire track."

In 1980, Warren varsity football players suffered exactly two injuries during practices: both sprained ankles, both occurring on the cinder track during calisthenics.

Two years later, Wilcox again visited Shea (who is a practicing athletic trainer), and again asked him about injuries. The reply: "We had to tape a few ankles due to hardness of the field during dry weather when we couldn't water the field. But we had no injuries serious enough to cause any players to miss either practice or play."

The program

Warren is a small school district, and thus must manage fields using limited financial resources. Though varsity games are at the local municipal field which is mowed by city crews, Warren High employees must aerate, seed and fertilize that field. What money is saved goes toward improving three practice fields, especially the varsity field behind the high school.

Annual cost for materials used on the practice fields is \$440. Here is what the cultural program looks like:

Early spring: Aerate fields to break up compaction. After the field

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Harry O. Wilcox (left), probe in hand, believes that soil compaction is the athletic field manager's biggest problem. He shares that observation with Arden Walter (center) and Toby Shea of Warren (Pa.) High School.

LANDSCAPE PROFILE

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has been aerated, bare and thin areas should be overseeded with Scott's Sports Turf Seed. A seeding rate of 2 to 3 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft. is recommended. Apply Scott's ProTurf High Density Starter Fertilizer to the entire field to stimulate early spring growth.

Spring: Apply ProTurf High Density Starter Fertilizer to improve root development and density.

Early summer: Apply Scott's Fertilizer Plus Dicot Weed Control to eliminate dandelions and 23 other broadleaf weeds while providing a full feeding of fertilizer.

Early fall: A couple of weeks prior to the opening of the season, apply Scott's ProTurf High Density Super Fairway Fertilizer, for thick dense turf with crowd-pleasing color.

Other practices

"Compaction is potentially our worst enemy," says Wilcox, a past president of the Pennsylvania Turfgrass Council. "If you're on a limited budget, the best thing to use your money for is aeration. At least two times a year—the more the better. I've never seen a field ruined by over-aerating."

Wilcox recommends using open- spoon tines because, he says, they

penetrate into the soil up to five inches. Other kinds of tines only penetrate two to three inches, he believes.

Some turf managers put too much emphasis on applying seed, according to Wilcox. "Seed is important if you have large bare

ANY BARE SPOTS IN ATHLETIC FIELDS LARGER THAN THIS (4-5 INCHES IN DIAMETER) SHOULD NOT BE SEEDED, ACCORDING TO TURF CONSULTANT HARRY O. WILCOX.

spots," he notes. "But it just doesn't pay to seed areas smaller than four or five inches across. If you aerify and fertilizer those spots, they'll heal by themselves."

Warren High School personnel applied 50 pounds of seed to the area inside the running track, which includes the practice field, this year.

Wilcox also believes that lime should be applied according to the type of grass in use. Bluegrass

definitely needs periodic liming while turf-type tall fescue may not.

According to district maintenance supervisor Arden Walter, the fields are mowed at 3 inches during the summer and 2½ inches when football practice begins. "We don't believe in mowing too low," he says. "And the way we fertilize, we find that we've got to mow at least once a week."

Keeping the three fields playable—and safe—takes two people 30 hours per week, according to Walter.

Constant cooperation

One of the most critical requirements of good field management is cooperation from the coaching staff.

Wilcox says that coaches should try and spread out practices. He says that Northampton (Pa.) High School uses the areas beyond the end zones of its practice field so three groups of players can each use a field 60 yards long.

Shea, when he was at the controls of the Dragon football team, didn't waste opportunities to cooperate with others like Arden Walter and Norge Luvison, director of buildings and grounds. "Men like Toby Shea are doing a wonderful job," says Wilcox. "I've never seen a coach who cared so much about his players." **LM**

THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN

During the fall, the townspeople of Findlay, Ohio direct most of their attention at Donnell Stadium. So when the field tried to hide under mud, it was noticed.

By Jeff Sobul, assistant editor

The field was only two years old. But it had aged well beyond its years. Eleven Findlay High School and Findlay College football games each year, numerous soccer games and other events, coupled with wet weather and poor drainage, had taken their toll. By the end of the second football season, in November, 1985, the Donnell Stadium field was unplayable.

In fact, an NAIA Division II playoff game between Findlay

College and St. Ambrose, Iowa, had to be played at nearby Bowling Green State University.

Something obviously had to be done.

And something was done. In addition to building a separate field for soccer to distribute field use, the Donnell field was replaced again, this time with a Prescription Athletic Turf (PAT) System perfected and patented by Purdue University professor Bill Daniel, Ph.D.

Artificial turf was considered. "It was either put in a PAT system or a similar system or go to artificial turf, which I won't do," says Jack Volkmer, business manager for Findlay Schools. "It's a horrible thing to make people compete on an artificial surface."

A little help

Now, boasts Volkmer, "Donnell is probably one of the nicest high school facilities around." The installation cost slightly less than