

ATHLETIC TURF

Toronto decides to go with artificial turf

Despite a strong push by grass backers, the Toronto Stadium Corp. has chosen to use an artificial surface in its new dome stadium. The Toronto dome will be the first in North America with a retractable roof.

Because of the roof's retractability, turf scientists agree that growing turf inside a dome is possible. Jim Watson, Ph.D., vice president of the Toro Co.; Bill Daniel, Ph.D., inventor of Prescription Athletic Turf (PAT); and Steve Wightman, sports turf manager of Denver's Mile High Stadium, addressed grass supporters and the Toronto Blue Jays' management earlier this year in Toronto.

The Stadium Corp. chose artificial turf despite a strong public support for grass. The *Toronto Star* asked readers to vote on the two surfaces. The results showed 4,515 people in favor of natural grass to 34 in favor of synthetic.

A confidential report by the Stadium Corp. stated that they chose artificial because:

- "To grow grass require a daily minimum of 50 percent of available daylight. This represents approximately, on average, six to eight hours of light per day."

- "The grass may not be able to withstand and recover from a series of back-to-back baseball and football games."

- "The natural grass systems require that the stadium not be used for other purposes immediately following the football season when time is required to remove the turf, and before the baseball season when time is required for resodding. There would be a minimum loss of a potential 25 revenue-generating days/year with a P.A.T.-type natural turf system. This would result in a projected loss over the first 14 years of approximately \$8.7 million."

- "The estimated cost premium of natural vs. artificial turf over the first 14 years of stadium use is approximately \$22 million."

- Plywood or another similar material must be placed over the natural grass to mount most non-sporting events. In the opinion of trade show experts, this would render this project a "second-class trade show facility" and would completely undermine its ability to attract world-class events.

- "There are major operational risks in installing a natural grass system in the Dome stadium. Such an installation would be unprecedented and there are no assurances that the grass would be in a suitable condition for opening baseball games. As no satisfactory warranties or guarantees are available, the Stadium Corporation would be required to assume the full risk for the major liabilities involved."

The testimony of Watson, Daniel and Wightman disputed many of the claims. Lighting depends not only on duration, but intensity of light. PAT marketers say turf would fare well with 35 hours of light per week.

Wightman can convert Mile High from baseball to football in 13½ hours. "We have overnight versatility and yet we have not sacrificed the safety and playability of the field," Wightman said.

Cost is another matter of interpretation. The Stadium Corp. included in its figures a 12-acre nursery at a cost of \$700,000. Sod could be grown at existing sod farms or nurseries and brought into the stadium.

Also, a new study by Robert Baade, a Lake Forest (Ill.) College economics professor, says that new stadiums produce few financial benefits for communities. Instead they "realign" economic growth.



Despite a vote of 4,515 to 34 by *Toronto Star* readers, the Toronto Stadium Corp. will put in artificial turf.

SEED

New bluegrasses replace two old Scotts' varieties

Two new varieties of Kentucky bluegrass developed by O.M. Scott & Sons—Coventry and Abbey—will begin replacing Bristol and Victa varieties, respectively, this year.

Coventry, under development since 1970, is an improved variety made from a cross of Gnome and an unreleased Scotts selection. In Scotts' tests, it has shown good shade tolerance and disease resistance. It will replace Bristol, introduced in 1976.

Abbey, developed at the company's Marysville, Ohio, research site, is adapted for both sun and

shade. It can be used in a wide range of geographic locations. Abbey replaces Victa, a patented variety introduced in 1973.

Other recent seed introductions from Scotts include Ovation perennial ryegrass and Chesapeake tall fescue. Ovation, developed by Momersteeg International in Holland, was a top performer in recent national winter overseeding trials. Chesapeake, developed from four clones, three of which originated in Atlanta, has shown excellent heat and drought tolerance in Scotts' tests, lowering irrigation needs.