

THE GREAT COVER-UP

When the Pope visited San Francisco last fall, he appeared on a day between two baseball games. The athletic field managers at Candlestick Park used a special fabric to save the turf.

by Heide Aungst, managing editor

Papal pageantry filled the air. On September 18, 1987, Pope John Paul II would bless the city by the Bay.

San Franciscans could think or talk of little else. While the city anxiously awaited the visit, however, Candlestick Park's field managers prayed the turf would hold up to the 10,000 people seated on the field, to say nothing of the Pope's entourage (including the Popemobile driving across it).

Barney Barron, superintendent of parks and recreation for San Francisco, spoke with confidence the day before the big event: "I have great re-

spect for the crew. They're used to working under pressure with time constraints. Sometimes we'll have a football game Sunday and a baseball game Monday," Barron explained.

The pressure Barron referred to meant laying 286,000 square feet of the Warren's TerraCover ground blanket. It would be the first time in history that a stadium would use two layers of TerraCover to protect the turf from wear injury.

"TerraCover is a 100 percent non-woven polyester needlepunched fabric," explains Emory Hunter of Warren's. The fabric originally was made from recycled plastic pop bottles. But

the company has since switched to a virgin polyester fiber. Candlestick used some of both types of the geotextile.

In the beginning

"We had heard nine months earlier that he (the Pope) would be coming to San Francisco and that Candlestick was a possible site," Barron explained. "About six months ago, we heard officially."

After that word came, Barron met extensively with various city agencies, the U.S. Secret Service and San Francisco's Archdiocese. "Once the date was chosen, it was up to Arch-



Pope John Paul II walks on the TerraCover fabric at Candlestick Park to greet worshippers.



Candlestick's crew, along with volunteers, starts to unroll the TerraCover to protect the field against wear.

diocese to get the Giants to give up a date," he said.

The Giants were scheduled to play the day before the visit, the day of the visit, and the day after the visit. By giving up the game on the day of the visit, they had to play a double-header over the weekend.

Once the date was chosen, the next step was to figure out how to put people on the field without hurting the turf.

Good and evil

"We thought the only way to do it was to put plywood on the field, then cover it," Barron said. "But when the Archdiocese priced plywood and the labor cost involved..."

Chairs couldn't be used without first covering the field. Nightmares of a Rolling Stones concert in October 1981 haunted Barron. "We weren't prepared for the event and didn't have a cover of any sort," he said. "The field was severely devastated."

Barron didn't want the primarily A-34 Kentucky bluegrass/sand-based field destroyed again. He called Steve Wightman, field manager at Denver's Mile High Stadium, for advice.

Wightman told Barron that he had successfully used TerraCover for rock

concerts and along bench areas in Mile High. Wightman, however, uses only one layer of fabric as protection. "If you put chairs on one layer of fabric, the leg can push in and give a dimpling effect, like a golf ball," ex-

plained Barron. "That's not bad if you have time after the event to work on the field. So the Archdiocese suggested we use a double layer of the fabric."

Since no one had done it before,



The A-34 Kentucky bluegrass/sand-based field at Candlestick Park was in top shape during the Giants' game the day before the Pope's visit.

Barron and head field manager Joe De-DelCarlo set up a test at San Francisco's old Kezar Stadium. The crew put two layers of fabric on part of the field, then set up 20 chairs on top of the fabric. On top of the chairs, they piled 80-lb. sacks of fertilizer.

"We left it overnight," Barron said. "The next day we had an in-service training class sit on the chairs and get up and down." Then they pulled the

Workers bundled up, sipped coffee, but never stopped rolling and tacking the fabric.

fabric up. "Don Foreman (Giants' stadium manager) couldn't find one single depression," Barron said. "Based on the test, he gave us permission to use the fabric."

Candlestick and the Archdiocese struck a deal. They would split the \$60,000 cost of the fabric and each group would own one layer.

Judgment day

On Thursday, Sept. 17, the Giants beat the Cincinnati Reds. When fans cleared out of the stadium at 5 p.m., Candlestick's crew of eight and about 100 teenaged volunteers from the San Francisco Conservation Corp. gained possession of the field.

Security tightened. No one could enter the stadium without passing

metal detectors and showing proper identification.

The workers laid the first layer of TerraCover, staking it down every foot or so. Each roll measured 300 ft. by 15 ft.. Some rolls were cut to size.



Emory Hunter of Warren's checks out the fabric before it is laid on the field.

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With one roll down, another worker started to mark the fabric, 12 inches in, so that the next layer could overlap. After an hour or so, however, the crew got the hang of laying down the fabric without marking off the 12-inches first. It saved time, too.

As the sun set, the winds off the frigid Bay whipped through Candlestick. "We can get gusts of 80 to 90 miles per hour," Barron said. Workers bundled up, sipped coffee, but never stopped rolling and tacking the fabric.

They layed fabric over turf and over a plywood altar support. The altar would be built from scratch. As the night wore on, the turf disappeared under a double layer of TerraCover.

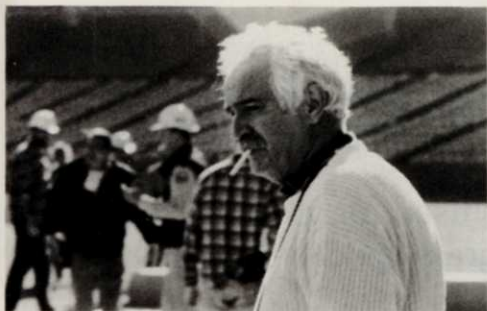
By 8 a.m. Friday morning, as devoted Catholics began to arrive by the busload, the workers finished the job. Most didn't even get to stay for the mass.

As expected, the Popemobile drove over the TerraCover-ed field. People rose up and down out of their seats in hopes of getting a chance to touch the Pope. Eucharistic ministers passed through the aisles giving communion.

The resurrection

Within several hours, mass ended. By about 4 p.m. Candlestick was clear.

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Barney Barron, San Francisco's superintendent of parks and recreation, oversees fabric laying.

The crew gathered long PVC pipes to re-roll the fabric and save it for the next big event. They rolled back each layer with eager anticipation. Would tire tracks show? Would there be dimpling from the chairs? Would the field be severely compacted from the traffic?

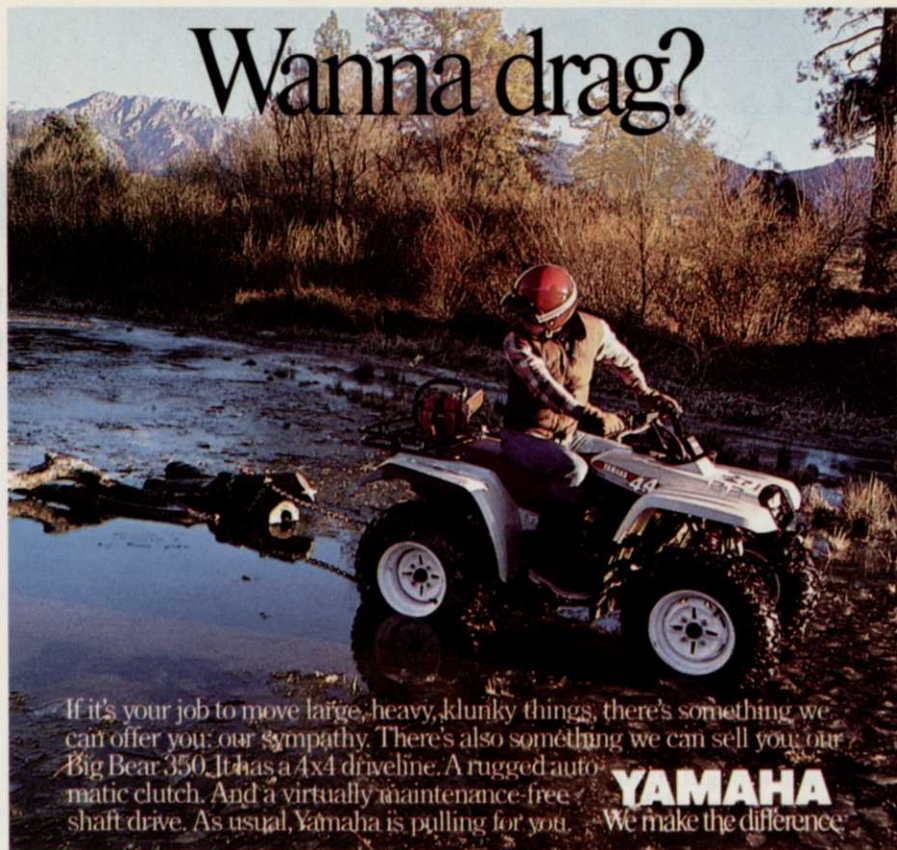
When exposed, the turf appeared slightly matted. It would need to be brushed upright. But no tire tracks or dimpling or severe compaction were evident. The TerraCover worked. "We'd definitely do it again," Barron said.

The next day the Giants played on the field. It looked striped and healthy. No one could tell that 10,000 people had trampled it the day before.

And the Giants won.

LM

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Two layers, totalling 286,000 square feet, of TerraCover, protected Candlestick's turf against wear.