

Sub-irrigation system suits 49ers' turf pro

Hey, call it coincidence. But Rich Genoff, sports turf manager of the San Francisco 49ers, points out the facts: "I came here in '88," he says with a broad grin, "and the 49ers have won the Super Bowl ever since."

Genoff will concede that just maybe the 49ers could have pulled it off without him, but there's no more of a 49er at heart than he.

In fact, Genoff spends more time on the practice fields at the team's new Marie P. DeBartolo Training Camp in Santa Clara, Calif., than do the players. As the only full-time groundskeeper, he can be found there year-round, at practically any hour of the day or night.

"It's my baby," he says of the 4.5 acres of grass. "I do everything but tuck it in and kiss it goodnight. And it doesn't bother me to put in a 16-hour day if that's what it takes to keep this turf top-notch all the time. The condition of the practice facility is real important to me and to the team. The better it looks, the better



Diseases are warded off the champion 49ers' practice fields by Rich Genoff.

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they feel."

The Warren's A34 bluegrass turf sits on 16 inches of sub-irrigated sand over a plastic barrier. The field also has fully automated overhead irrigation, using 690 sprinkler heads and a PSI pumping station.

"I use the overhead irrigation for seeding, to water in chemicals, or to prime the field when it gets dry," Genoff explains, "then I sub-irrigate for about an hour-and-a-half, and that lasts me up to two weeks."

"The sub-irrigation is great. I can control it from a panel in my office, and don't have to worry about clocks going off or heads sticking open. I could water the field while the team is playing and they'd never know it."

The system also conserves water, he explains, because he's not losing anything to evaporation. With water in short supply throughout California, that's an important benefit.

Coming from a golf course background, Genoff is used to replacing divots. "But I've never seen divots like we take out here," he laughs. "These are big guys and they are fast. When you get 110 of them here for a mini-camp, all trying to impress the coaches, they really get into it. And

when they stop and make a cut, the turf goes flying. But I would rather they take a divot than have that grass lock up and injure a knee. It means the turf is doing exactly what it's supposed to do."

Genoff acknowledges that turf diseases are a problem, just as they are a problem on most high-maintenance turf.

"Poa annua is my worst enemy, like it is with any turf man who wants a nice stand of bluegrass," Genoff states. But he gets excellent results with Chipco Ronstar G brand herbicide as a pre-emergent. He applies the material in late March and again in September. "It does a real good job keeping the lawns weed-free and that helps me devote more time to the playing fields."

When the practice field was first laid down, Genoff used Chipco Ronstar on it twice for year-long pre-emergence control. "It performed very well," he reports, "but because of the heavy use of the practice turf and the need to frequently re-seed, it's hard to schedule in a pre-emergence application. I've had to go to spot sprays on the playing turf. It's a constant battle, but I haven't found anything that

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works as well as Ronstar for poa."

Genoff uses Subdue and Chipco Aliette brand fungicides for pythium control. Subdue provides control through root uptake while Aliette provides quick foliar systemic control as well as root uptake. He keeps Aliette on hand because its low toxicity and quick action al-

The sub-surface irrigation system used by Rick Genoff saves water, since none is lost to evaporation.

low him to respond fast to a disease problem. "If I see that the weather is getting up there in the 90s or 100s and the nights are staying about 80 percent humidity, then I'm going to be ready to go with Aliette."

for rhizoctonia and helminthosporium control, Genoff uses Chipco 26019 brand fungicide.

Try rotating fields to save turf

In everything he does, Rich Genoff keeps the players' needs foremost in his mind. "I adjust to the team's needs; they don't adjust to mine," he points out. At the same time, he says the coaches and players are cooperative. "If I rope an area off, they're pretty good about staying out. It's a good working relationship."

Genoff spends the winter months getting the fields ready for spring mini-camps. He then has to get the fields back into prime condition prior to the beginning of fall practice. "But once the season starts," he says, "the fields are to practice on, not to look at. I have the capability of making five different configurations of the fields, running two fields north and south, and two fields east and west. Then, if we make it to the playoffs, I go out and find the best turf, pull the sprinkler heads and put in a practice field. By the end of the season, the fields have taken a real beating, but they will still be playable because of the rotations." □

"All of these materials will perform well for you if you follow the label and treat them with respect. I have to be extra cautious because of the heavy use of the facility by the athletes. My fertilizers and granular pesticides are applied in the evening because they need to be watered in, and almost all of my spraying is done at about 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. That way, the vegetation is dry and any odor is

gone long before the players are out here."

If you get the impression that Genoff takes a lot of pride in his work, you're right. "There's only one world champion and only one (49ers owner) Eddie DeBartolo," he notes. "Both are totally committed to being the best, and it rubs off on you. No one connected with the team gets left out. When the team wins, we all win." **LM**

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