

# HOT TOPICS

## MSU readies turf for first World Cup soccer indoors

**Four first-round games at Pontiac Silverdome in 1994 will showcase the efforts of researchers to millions of television viewers.**

**EAST LANSING, Mich.**—A team of Michigan State University researchers is promising world-class playing conditions for the World Cup soccer games scheduled for Pontiac, Mich., in 1994.

That means only one thing to FIFA, the tournament's governing body—turfgrass. Real, living, growing turfgrass. FIFA reportedly wouldn't have agreed to the Silverdome site without the guarantee of a real turfgrass playing surface.

This presents a huge challenge to the MSU team headed by Dr. John "Trey" Rogers and John C. Stier. The near-perfect turfgrass field they're promising will be *inside* the Silverdome.

The World Cup is a global competition. Several hundred million people worldwide will follow every kick, every scoring attempt of the four first-round games at the Detroit-area site June 17-July 17, 1994. Some of their attention will be focused on the condition of the playing field, since these will be the first-ever World Cup games played indoors.

Rogers and research assistant Stier updated MSU's World Cup involvement last November to about 30 media representatives.

The group crammed into MSU's "Silverdome West," a 6,500-sq.-ft. quonset structure on the MSU campus about 1 1/2 hours west of the real Silverdome. Its



**About 2,000 of these hexagonal turfgrass containers will be fitted together to make World Cup soccer field inside the Pontiac Silverdome. MSU's 'Silverdome West' in the background.**

dome is covered with the same fiberglass material and the same forced-air suspension system as the Silverdome.

Inside MSU's structure, banks of high-intensity lights illuminate dozens of 4x4-foot wooden boxes. The turfgrass in each box is growing under slightly different conditions—moisture, fertilizers, plant growth regulators, etc.

This past summer the researchers also tended and observed test plots inside the real Silverdome.

"We deliberately stressed the grass to see what it would take," says Rogers. "And it looked bad when the trials were over. But it was a successful effort."

Actually, the turfgrass will be inside the Silverdome only for one exhibition game in 1993, and, again, for the four games over nearly two weeks in June-July 1994. Researchers are confident the turfgrass

field will fare well in the exhibition game.

It *has* to perform well for the World Cup, Rogers and Stier say.

The turfgrass is being grown this winter in California by Pacific Sod. It is a mixture of 85 percent Kentucky bluegrass and 15 percent perennial ryegrass—three varieties of both, two of each chosen for wear tolerance, and one of each for shade tolerance.

In April the sod will be cut, rolled and shipped by truck to Michigan where it will be transplanted into hexagonal metal boxes filled with six inches of topsoil (8 parts sand, one part native sandy loam and one part Michigan peat). This work will take place in Pontiac.

Each hexagonal box is seven feet across and weighs 3,000 lbs. It will take 2,000 of them, plus some triangular and trapezoidal boxes, to cover the Silverdome's

### ELSEWHERE

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**John 'Trey' Rogers: MSU staff learning how to keep turfgrass healthy inside the dome.**



**John C. Stier: By June 1994 the turfgrass should be rooted to bottom of metal containers.**

asphalt floor. They will be moved into the Silverdome a few days before next summer's exhibition game, then removed after the exhibition game to be reassembled and used as an outdoor athletic field.

"This will give the turfgrass an opportunity to mature," says Stier. "By the time the field is needed in 1994, the roots of the turfgrass should be to the bottom of the containers."

Just prior to the summer 1994 World

Cup, the field goes inside again.

The top of each box is slightly wider than the bottom, and the sides of the boxes are made in two pieces with the upper pieces being removed as the boxes are fit together. The boxes will fit together tightly with at least three inches of soil between the field's surface and any metal edges.

"We will look at the possibility of adding soil in the seams but we don't think it will be necessary," says Rogers.

The MSU staff is confident its work should add significantly to what's known about growing turfgrass in the shade.

"One possibility would be for shady fairways and greens," says Rogers. "A number of golf courses are already using plant growth regulators on problem areas. But it's all being done on a 'best guess' basis. We think our research should provide some answers as to how much to use under various conditions."

Also, it's likely researchers will come up with a list of recommendations for home lawn care under shady conditions.

Beyond that, additional work on finding materials that will allow much more sunlight (the Silverdome roof only lets in 10 percent of the available sunlight) may hasten the day when permanent indoor turfgrass surfaces can be maintained. This would allow the playing of outdoor sports on a year-around basis in northern states.

"We think we have a good, sound game plan," says Rogers, "But we have a lot of research to do."

—Ron Hall

**Rep. Charles Stenholm: don't call them crazy**

**INDIANAPOLIS**—U.S. Rep Charles Stenholm (D-Texas) says it's high time that pesticide-using industries and their critics, the so-called environmentalists, rediscover the seemingly lost art of give and take.

"Compromise is not a four-letter word," Stenholm told about 200 LCOs at PLCAA's annual conference here this past November. He asked the audience not to brand anti-pesticide critics as extremists. "When we say one of them is crazy, they say we're crazy," said Stenholm.

Instead, Stenholm said LCOs should "continually" put the facts about the products they use and the good things they do in front of their customers and, even, Congress. He urged the LCOs to maximize the impact of these facts by building coalitions with other pesticide-using industries, particularly agriculture.

"We have to show the public we can deal with their concerns in a very rational way," said Stenholm.

He admitted that neither lawn care nor agriculture has had much success in defending its use of pesticides. And that neither, by itself, carries a whole lot of



**Rep. Stenholm tells LCOs to get to know 110 new members of Congress.**

political clout.

But, he pointed out, there are indications that more and more working people are turning away from extreme environmental positions. They're afraid their jobs will be affected by even stricter regulations, he said.

—Ron Hall

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