

# HOT TOPICS

## 'Dome' grass looks good

**Millions of soccer fans get their first look at efforts to provide a world class turfgrass field inside the Pontiac Silverdome.**

**PONTIAC, Mich.**—As exciting as watching grass grow, you say?

Don't use that phrase in conversation with John N. "Trey" Rogers III, Paul Rieke, John Stier, or any of the other Michigan State University turfgrass researchers involved in putting turfgrass—the real stuff—*inside* the Pontiac Silverdome.

"My phone rings off the hook constantly," said Rogers as he hustled from one group of reporters to another, just prior to the first-ever international soccer game being played on real grass inside a domed stadium.

More than 450 journalists from around the world reported on the June 19th U.S. Cup game between England and Germany. More than 80 countries received its telecast. Two days later, the U.S. Women's National Soccer team played the women's team from Canada, again inside the Silverdome on green, living grass.

These games, important enough in their own right, really amount to a dress rehearsal for the four 1994 World Cup games set at the Silverdome June 18-28, 1994.

More than 1 billion people will view first-round World Cup games taking place here, and in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, Dallas, New York, Orlando and Washington D.C. The Detroit games will be the only ones played in a domed stadium. World Cup games *must* be played on turfgrass.

Pacific Sod in California, because of the longer growing season, grew the Silverdome's turfgrass sod (85 percent Kentucky bluegrass, 15 percent perennial ryegrass). It was shipped to southeast Michigan this past spring and transplanted to hexagonal metal boxes filled with six inches of topsoil.

The Silverdome turfgrass field is probably the largest jigsaw puzzle in the world—certainly the largest that's both alive and green.

Workmen began putting it together June 8th. Under the supervision of the MSU turfgrass team, they stripped metal bands from the sod-holding hexagons and forklifted each into position.



**A fleet of forklifts positioned each of 2,000 separate pieces of sod into a rectangular carpet of turfgrass.**

Almost 2,000 hexagons, each weighing about 3,000 lbs. and measuring 7½ ft. across, were fitted with a smaller number of trapezoidal and triangular boxes of sod to make the rectangular playing field.

A lack of light seems to be the biggest challenge to growing excellent turfgrass. Less than 10 percent of the sunlight on a sunny day penetrates the dome's Teflon-coated fiberglass roof.

"We're still in an experimental stage," admitted Rogers. "What we'll find out from these games is if we'll need to bring in any additional lights for the World Cup."



**Some handwork is required to fit the hexagons into a nearly seamless 'pitch.'**

After this June's soccer games, the turfgrass was removed from the field and placed in the parking lot. It will be returned to the dome next summer for the five World Cup games.

Rogers said the MSU turfgrass team is confident the field will provide world class World Cup playing conditions, but lots more needs to be learned before turfgrass becomes practical in domes.

"But by the year 2,000 we'll be so much more knowledgeable that this field will look like a dinosaur to us," said Rogers.

—Ron Hall

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