

Turf diseases keep Browns' chief busy

■ Vince R. Patterozzi's grandest dream is to help the Cleveland Browns professional football team get to the Super Bowl. They've never gone.

His immediate goal—and the task for which he was hired almost four years ago—is to make sure they perform on the best and safest playing surfaces possible.

Vince, the Browns' grounds manager, said that this summer presented him with a new set of grounds management challenges. Each season does. Probably the most vexing problem in 1995 has been the proliferation of turf diseases, particularly in the practice fields. Pythium, summer patch and fusarium blight—they all reared their ugly heads, he said.

Temperatures averaging 10 degrees above normal and unremitting humidity through August didn't help matters, said Vince. Nor did a 3/4-inch layer of



Vince Patterozzi, center, told Cleveland-area PGMS members that he battled turf diseases all summer at the Browns' training camp.



Even with the daily pounding of 80 huge football players the practice fields (80 percent sand/20 percent soil) provided reliable footing.

thatch in the turfgrass. Actually, he hadn't been displeased with the thatch prior to the disease problem. It had kept the cleats of the huge players from churning up bare earth.

"I watch people's feet, if they slip or if they don't slip," said
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El Toro zoysiagrass, right side of the string, tolerated mid-summer traffic better than the Kentucky bluegrass/ryegrass blend to its left.

Zoysia gets test at training camp

■ Zoysiagrass now covers what used to be blacktop paths along the sides of the practice fields at the Cleveland Browns training facility.

Fans congregate to watch practices here. It's also where telescoping "high-boys" hoist metal buckets containing cameras and spotters high above the action.

This past off-season, grounds manager Vince Patterozzi installed 2,200 yards of El Toro zoysiagrass there.

"We have to have a grass that's very tolerant this time of the year," he told about 40 visiting PGMS members on a blistering day in August.

At least through the heat of midsummer the experiment was working. The grass, in spite of weekly thunderstorms and brutal daily pedestrian traffic, retained fine color and cover.

"Now we have to find out when it's going to go dormant and when it will come out of dormancy," Patterozzi told the other grounds pros.

"We want to find out if it encroaches on the bluegrass (the practice fields are a Kentucky bluegrass/perennial rye combo). Or, in the fall or spring, will the bluegrass encroach on it." He said Dr. Bill Pound at Ohio State University plans to introduce about six more varieties of zoysiagrass at the facility to test their wear and cold tolerance.

"Maybe we can help out schools, particularly low-budget schools. Maybe they can introduce this zoysiagrass into their sports fields," said Patterozzi.