

Turf Report

Qwest Field Seattle, WA

**Turf Supplier and
Installation Contractor**

West Coast Turf
Stevinson, California

Seahawks Stadium Field Director

John Wright
Seattle, WA



Qwest Field, A Natural for Soccer Match

When it opened in 2001, Seattle's Seahawks Stadium (now Qwest Field) was billed as a premier facility for professional football *and* soccer. The stadium's field was built to meet international soccer field standards—dimensions are 115 yards long and 70 yards wide—as the Seahawks organization wanted to feed the soccer-frenzied Seattle community by constructing a stadium that would draw top international soccer matches.

The stadium features accommodations ideal for professional soccer, with one exception: elite international teams—such as in the European Premier League—have balked at Qwest's FieldTurf playing surface. They have a strong preference for natural grass when playing abroad because that's what most of them play on at home. "We haven't been able to convince them to play on anything but grass," said Mike McPaul, of First and Goal, Inc., Qwest Field's parent company.

West Coast Turf—The Right Fit

After some searching, First and Goal discovered the challenging project of installing sod over synthetic turf could be achieved only by locating the right sod and the right people. They found them both in West Coast Turf and the two organizations have forged a successful partnership. On three separate occasions West Coast Turf's hybrid bermuda has been shipped and installed over the Qwest Field's artificial surface, allowing it in a matter of days, to become "international soccer friendly."

And the results speak for themselves. A string of famous teams, including Manchester United, Chelsea and the Glasgow Celtics have been attracted to the field—along with huge crowds of fans hungry to watch world class soccer events. These projects have been such a huge success that First and Goal anticipates continued work with West Coast Turf in helping bring big name soccer favorites to Seattle.

The inaugural use of this unique application came in March 2003 when West Coast Turf harvested more than 87,000 square feet of Tifway II bermuda sod from its California sod farm. The sod, which had been overseeded with perennial rye grass, was then shipped and installed for an exhibition soccer match at Seahawks Stadium between the United States and Venezuela. Later that season West Coast Turf converted the field to natural turf again for a match



West Coast Turf installed a temporary natural grass field over the existing FieldTurf surface at Qwest Field, in preparation for the March 29, 2003, U.S.–Venezuela exhibition soccer match.

Tifway II Bermuda at a Glance

Uses

Sports fields, golf courses, school playgrounds, parks and heavily used home lawns

Color

Dark blue-green

Mowing Height

3/8"—1 1/2"

Growth Habit

Compact, dense

Cushion

Excellent

Durability

Excellent

Disease Resistance

(Very good to excellent) Resistant to stinging, root knot and ring nematodes

Heat Tolerance

Excellent

Spring Green Up

Aggressive

Foot-Traffic Tolerance

Excellent

Recovery From Injury

Excellent

USDA Zones

7 to 11

Options

Regular rolls, thick cut and overseeded



featuring Manchester United, one of the premier soccer clubs in Europe. The match landed on ESPN2 and entertained more than 68,000 fans at Seahawks Stadium.

In July 2004, John Wright, field director of Seahawks Stadium, oversaw the third installation and maintenance of West Coast Turf for another round of international soccer competition—this time between Chelsea and the Glasgow Celtics. The teamwork, efficiency and organization of West Coast Turf left a lasting impression on him.

"With a project this big which has the Seahawks name attached to it, I would insist on working with West Coast Turf," Wright said. "In my opinion they have proven their capabilities."

Installation A Success

To get as much use as possible from the natural grass, four other soccer games were scheduled around the July international soccer match between Chelsea and the Celtic national team in an eight-day period, including a youth game and Seattle's men's and women's semiprofessional teams.

The sod arrived on flatbed trailers and was ready for installation beginning July 14. "It was a vibrant green and was in great condition," said Wright, who formerly worked at a sod farm.

Prior to installation, the field was covered with a layer of plastic and then a heat-treated geotextile. This method was proven in the 2003 projects as an effective way to protect the FieldTurf and to keep the sod from repositioning under the players' feet.

West Coast Turf installed the sod in two days. Wright only had time to quickly water the field with portable Rain Bird sprinklers the night before the stadium's first two games on July 17. From there, the field was mowed and irrigated daily, with the Seahawks field maintenance team being careful not to apply too much water since no drainage system existed.

Bermuda Sod Withstands Heavy Traffic

Thanks to the Tifway II bermuda grass's durability, the field saw minor, expected divoting during the five games but no major damage. In addition, the sod meshed well together while down just a short time, a testament to maintenance practices and the quality of the sod.

"Bermuda grass is ideal for soccer matches," said Greg Dunn, who grew the sod at the West Coast Turf farm in northern California. "Because of the tightly-packed leaves near the soil surface that helps create a thick, closed canopy, the sod provides excellent footing and a cushion-like feel."

Wright agreed. "Though it is a warm season grass and is not native to Seattle, bermuda grass is the toughest grass out there for handling the stress that it was put through."

And on West Coast Turf's performance: "This is the first time I have worked with Greg and West Coast Turf, and I could not see it going any better than it did," Wright said. "They were amazingly efficient."

The turf was removed July 27, but it did not go to waste. Instead, it found a permanent home with Steilacom Historic School District No. 1 in Seattle, where (at this writing), it was ready to begin use as the surface for a football and soccer field.

"The donation of the West Coast Turf after each of the three projects has received a very positive response from the community," Dunn said. "Right away, the Tifway II bermuda will thrive and provide an exceptionally durable grass and a superior playing surface." This is borne out by the city of Kirkland, Washington, another recipient of turf from Qwest Field in 2003. According to Parks Superintendent Jason Filan, "We had a beat-up soccer field that was really in horrible shape," Filan said, "but with the prospect of getting the West Coast Turf, we prepped it thoroughly and turned an ugly duckling into a first-class field that has held up well after two seasons of heavy use."

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