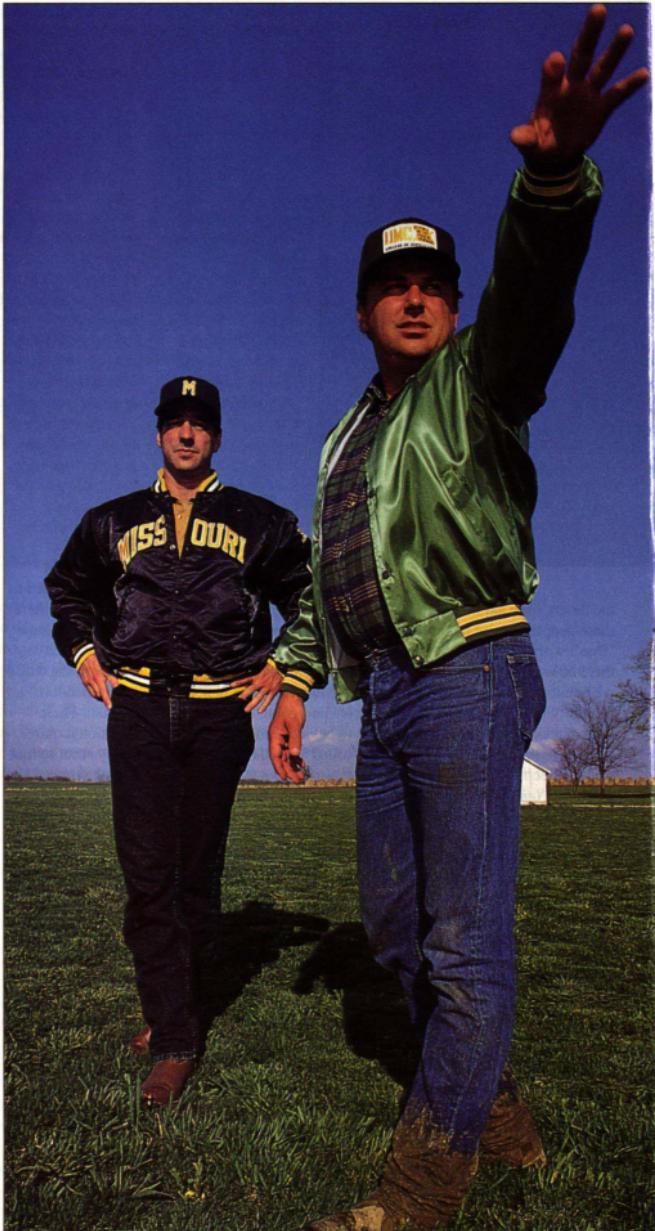


Sowing,
growing,
mowing
**Grass
for
Faurot
Field**

BY TERRY JORDAN

Growing grass is muddy business. Dr. David Minner, left, and Gene Sandner, BS Ag '83, survey grass growing in western Boone County. Sandner and Darrell Selsam, BS BA '36, MA '37, of S&S Seed Farms and Evergreen Sod provided the acreage to grow Faurot Field's sod.

Rob Hill photo



Gene McArtor, Mizzou's former baseball coach, was frustrated by a recurring drainage problem in the outfield at Simmons Field. So he called his old friend, George Toma, head groundskeeper for the Kansas City Royals and Kansas City Chiefs, and a noted expert in the field.

Toma referred McArtor to Dr. David Minner, MU associate professor of horticulture and state turfgrass specialist. "He's the guy I go to when I have a question I can't answer," Toma said. That was in spring 1991. McArtor, BS Ed '63, M Ed '64, PhD '72, called Minner that day, the two talked about the poor field conditions, and Minner agreed to help. Since then, a number of interesting events have occurred:

- In a cooperative effort between academics and athletics, with some cost-saving measures thrown in, Minner directed a renovation of Simmons Field in fall 1992. The improvements included an all-new infield, a wall-to-wall irrigation system, AstroTurf aprons in high-traffic areas near the dugouts, an underground heating system to speed growth of grass for early-season games, and better drainage throughout the entire field — all for \$20,000.
- Shortly thereafter, Minner was named Groundskeeper of the Year by the American Baseball Coaches Association, an honor which normally goes to a current, full-time groundskeeper, not a consultant or turf specialist. "But I can't think of anyone who deserves it more," McArtor says.
- Athletic Director Joe Castiglione and former Director Dan Devine announced last year that Minner would head up a project to convert Faurot Field to natural grass for the 1995 football season. Dr. Roger Mitchell, dean of agriculture, food and natural resources, calls the effort "a happy marriage of two important programs on campus."

Castiglione, Devine and McArtor say they couldn't have picked a better field architect than Minner, who grew up listening to the Baltimore Orioles on the radio from his home in Seaford, Del., and lettered in three sports in high school. "I'm proud to say that I was at Memorial Stadium in Baltimore the day that Frank

Robinson hit the only home run that ever traveled completely out of the stadium," Minner says.

That was in the late 1960s, shortly before Minner began working summers on the maintenance crew at the Seaford Country Club. "I mowed grass and tended to greens on the golf course, and learned some things about making grass grow," he says. "One year, my friends and I built a baseball diamond in our neighborhood, and played on it and took care of it throughout the summer. Those experiences got me interested in the whole study of turf."

His interest led to a bachelor's degree in plant science from the University of Delaware, a master's in agronomy from the University of Maryland, and a PhD in horticulture from Colorado State University. Now, with the new sports projects, he's come full circle.

"For years, of course, everyone played on grass before synthetic turfs came into being in the 1960s," Minner says. "And for a long time after that, we believed that AstroTurf and the like would solve all our problems. In recent years, though, due to

injuries from artificial turf and the simple fact of a better playing surface with grass, everyone wants to come back."

He notes that the Royals and Chiefs are considering a move to natural grass — he's been asked to consult on the project, in fact — and new baseball fields for the Orioles, Cleveland Indians and Chicago White Sox are natural grass. Where college football is concerned, Oklahoma is expected to unveil its all-grass field this fall.

Minner acknowledges that the Faurot Field project will be a much more complete rebuilding than the Simmons Field renovation. First, the present OmniTurf surface — consisting of 6 inches of rock drainage, 4 inches of popcorn asphalt, a 2-inch rubber mat and sand-filled synthetic carpet surface — must be removed. Additional excavation may be required to lower the field, thus improving the view from seats close to it. Then, new drains will be installed, topped by, in order, 4 inches of pea gravel; 8 inches of root zone sand mixed with organic matter; 4 inches of TurfGrids, reinforced sand, and the Kentucky bluegrass sod.

Turf out, grass in

The task of laying the new natural-grass turf on Faurot Field will begin as soon as the 1994 football season is over, Athletic Director Joe Castiglione says.

"We play our last home game against Kansas on Nov. 19," he says. "I fully expect that by Thanksgiving, we'll be out there taking up the old OmniTurf."

Some of the artificial turf may be used on various fields at Mizzou — Castiglione points out that dugout aprons on Simmons Field are made of AstroTurf — while other pieces will be sold. He dismisses a rumor that the OmniTurf will be re-installed at another site as a football practice field. "It's 10 years old and too worn," he says.

Excavation work and the installation of a new drainage system will continue through the winter. "Then we'll start laying the various sand-based subsurfaces, and by April or May we'll install the new sod."

The grass will be tended through the summer, and if tentative schedules hold true, the Tigers will play the first game on the new surface against Bowling Green on Sept. 9, 1995.

Castiglione estimates the cost of the project at between \$600,000 and \$700,000; about half of that will go for excavation. No special fund drive will be set up. "We'll pay for it out of funds from our capital campaign, which we're conducting now," he adds.

Castiglione notes that Don Faurot, former coach, athletic director and the person for whom the field is named, is 91 and still active.

"Coach Faurot helped lay the original grass turf on the field in 1926," Castiglione says. "We hope to see him out there helping us lay the new grass next year."

Why sand? "Because you need to keep the field as dry as possible during games or the sod will easily rip," Minner says. "Specially graded sands, being more porous than clay, give you good, fast drainage. I like my fields to move between 5 and 10 inches of internal water an hour." The main problem with the old grass surface at Faurot Field, he adds, was the 24 inches of clay underneath. "That wouldn't allow drainage at all, so turf diseases took over on the wet field and the weak surface couldn't take the traffic. It was a hopeless situation that wouldn't improve without reconstruction."

To those who don't believe grass can grow in Memorial Stadium, Minner says not to worry. "The key is to put in proper subsurface drainage with a special sand-based root zone. What we'll do at Faurot Field is similar to what they've done at the other successful new grass parks, such as Camden Yards in Baltimore, Comiskey Park in Chicago and the new Jacobs Field in Cleveland, where the Indians will play.

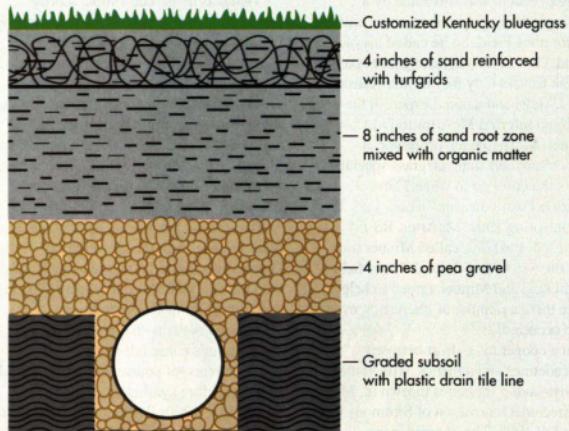
"Indeed, grass will grow on Faurot Field. I'll stake my reputation on it."

The grass is growing nicely on the infield at Simmons, where in 1992 new Head Coach Tim Jamieson led the baseball team in replacing the old sod, soil and gravel with new materials. A donation from the Tiger Bullpen Club helped make it possible.

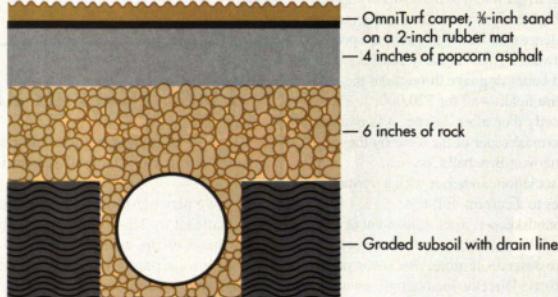
While volunteers will not be used to the same extent on the Faurot Field project, donations and donated materials are just as welcome. Gene Sandner, BS Ag '83, and Darrell Seltzam, BS BA '36, MA '37, owners of S&S Seed Farms and Evergreen Sod of Rocheport, Mo., provided the sod for Simmons Field and are offering their land for growing Faurot Field's turf. "We'll need the equivalent of about 2 ½ acres of sod for Faurot, and we've got almost 20 acres growing out at Evergreen," Minner says. "We'll be fine."

This is the largest project yet for Minner, who helped on projects for the Los Angeles Raiders and the Cleveland Browns. "I'm looking forward to working with Larry Smith as well," he says. "The Tigers are bouncing back, and we're going to help them. We'll give them a field they can be proud of."

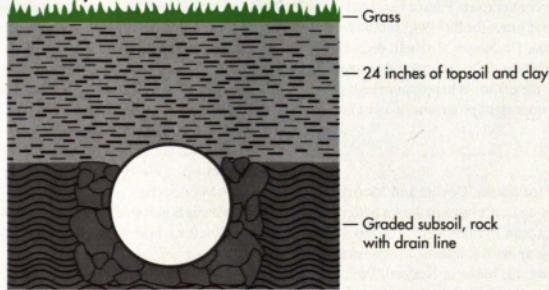
Cross sections of Faurot Field



▲ The future (1995-)



▲ The present (1985-1994)



▲ The past (1926-1984)