



NGF Golf and Kevin Holmes Build the Green at BMO Field

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TORONTO, ON – While soccer fans may see BMO Field as the finest natural grass soccer field in Canada, Kevin Holmes likes to think of it as the largest green he's ever designed. The lead golf course architect and partner at Toronto-based MBTW Watchorn, teamed up with general contractor North Gate Farms of Campbellville to design/build the high-profile grass field that opened on budget and on time for Toronto FC's 2010 home opener on April 15th.

"We have worked with MBTW Watchorn for over 20 years on a variety of projects and have developed a great partnership," says North Gate Farms President, Bill Searle, who also operates NGF Golf and is a partner at Otter Creek GC. They imported the same high-tech technology that's used under the greens at Augusta National Golf Club installing the first SubAir aeration and moisture removal system in Canada.

"I like to think of BMO Field as the largest green we have ever designed, there are certainly a lot of similarities," says Holmes. The \$3.5 million project was completed on a tight schedule between November 30, 2009 and March 31, 2010.

Most of the greens Holmes and associate Jon Joyce design have a bit of contour and sometimes a nasty swale or two. The newest creation for Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, which owns the Toronto Maple Leafs and Toronto Raptors and manages the City of Toronto-owned facility, is as flat as a pancake. "I haven't tried putting on it, but the soccer players are really impressed and that's what counts," Holmes says. Field dimensions are 68m x 105m, meeting FIFA standards. That's a BIG green!

Joyce called the project a terrific learning opportunity working with a world-class company like SubAir. "I like to call it the world's largest Shop-Vac," Joyce says of the system that literally sucks excess moisture from the field when it gets too wet or adds moisture during a heat wave. It can keep different grasses cool during a heat wave, or keep them warm during a cold snap.

"We're now the experts in Canada when it comes to this type of facility and would like to continue our partnership with North Gate Farms to take what we have learned from this field and apply it to other projects, whether it's for the CFL, MLS or other fields," says Holmes.

North Gate Farms ripped out the artificial turf that it initially installed for the start of the team's inaugural season in 2007 filling the hole with the new state-of-the-art system. They topped it off with a Dwarf Bluegrass turf that was harvested from Zander Sod Co. of Kettleby and laid it on March 30-31. North Gate actually supervised the temporary sod covering that was installed last summer for the friendly between Toronto FC and Real Madrid.

"It took six weeks to lay the artificial turf and only six hours to take it out," Searle says. "The decision to replace the artificial turf was made because it was showing signs of wear and tear. Most importantly, MLSE wanted to provide its team with the best possible playing conditions and reduce the risk of injury." BMO field is scheduled to host the MLS Cup 2010 on November 21. Searle says that despite the late date, the turf should be in A-1 condition.

Some of the technical highlights of the system include:

- 23 kms of Glycol heated tubing runs beneath the surface eight inches apart.
- A perimeter irrigation system - only three sprinkler heads within the actual playing surface and all others run down the outer limits of the field.
- Four, two-million BTU boilers for heating the field over four separate zones.
- The first glycol heated, Sub Air field in the world that is monitored by remote sensors.





SubAir, invented by former Augusta National superintendent Marsh Benson, is the Rolls Royce of green and turf conditioning systems. Aside from Augusta National, where Benson perfected it, the system is in place at Pebble Beach, TPC Sawgrass, Congressional CC and several other high-end courses. Professional teams that use SubAir sports fields include; Chicago Fire, NJ Red Bulls and REAL Salt Lake in the MLS; NY Mets, St. Louis Cardinals and Philadelphia Phillies in MLB and Denver Broncos and New England Patriots in the NFL to name a few.

ABOUT NGF Golf - a division of North Gate Farms Ltd: Bill Searle founded North Gate Farms Ltd. and NGF Golf in 1993. The company specializes in golf course construction and renovation, park and sports field developments and the development of multi-million dollar estate homes. At the head office in Campbellville they grow specimen size trees that are hard to find. Searle is also a partner in the highly-touted Otter Creek GC near Woodstock, which NGF Golf built. He has worked with Holmes on various projects including renovations and new holes at Huron Oaks in Sarnia over the last two years. NGF Golf is currently building a new short course at Hamilton G&CC and the company spent 2008 and 2009 carrying out improvements to St. George's G&CC to prepare it for the 2010 RBC Canadian Open. NGF Golf also designed/built the ultra private King of Clubs nine-hole course in King City among other projects.

ABOUT MBTW WATCHORN: Since 1998, Holmes has been the lead golf course architect at MBTW/Watchorn, a multi-disciplinary firm of landscape architects, urban designers and planners, and golf course architects that have provided professional consulting for over 30 years. Holmes and Joyce have teamed up on a number of golf course projects for MBTW/Watchorn including: Riverstone G&CC in Brampton, Island Springs Golf Resort on St. Joseph Island, King's Bay G&CC in Seagrave, The Bridges at Tillsonburg, Carruther's Creek Golf Centre in Ajax, Watson's Glen GC in Pickering, Crimson Ridge GC in Sault Ste. Marie, Black Horse Golf & Country Resort near Kincardine and Fort Frances GC. The new RedCrest Course at Cardinal GC in Kettleby is nominated for Best New Course in Canada for 2010 by both SCORE and Golf Digest magazines.

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