

# Turf News

A publication of Turfgrass Producers International

The only magazine devoted *exclusively* to turfgrass production



## *Annual Equipment & Product Buyer's Guide*

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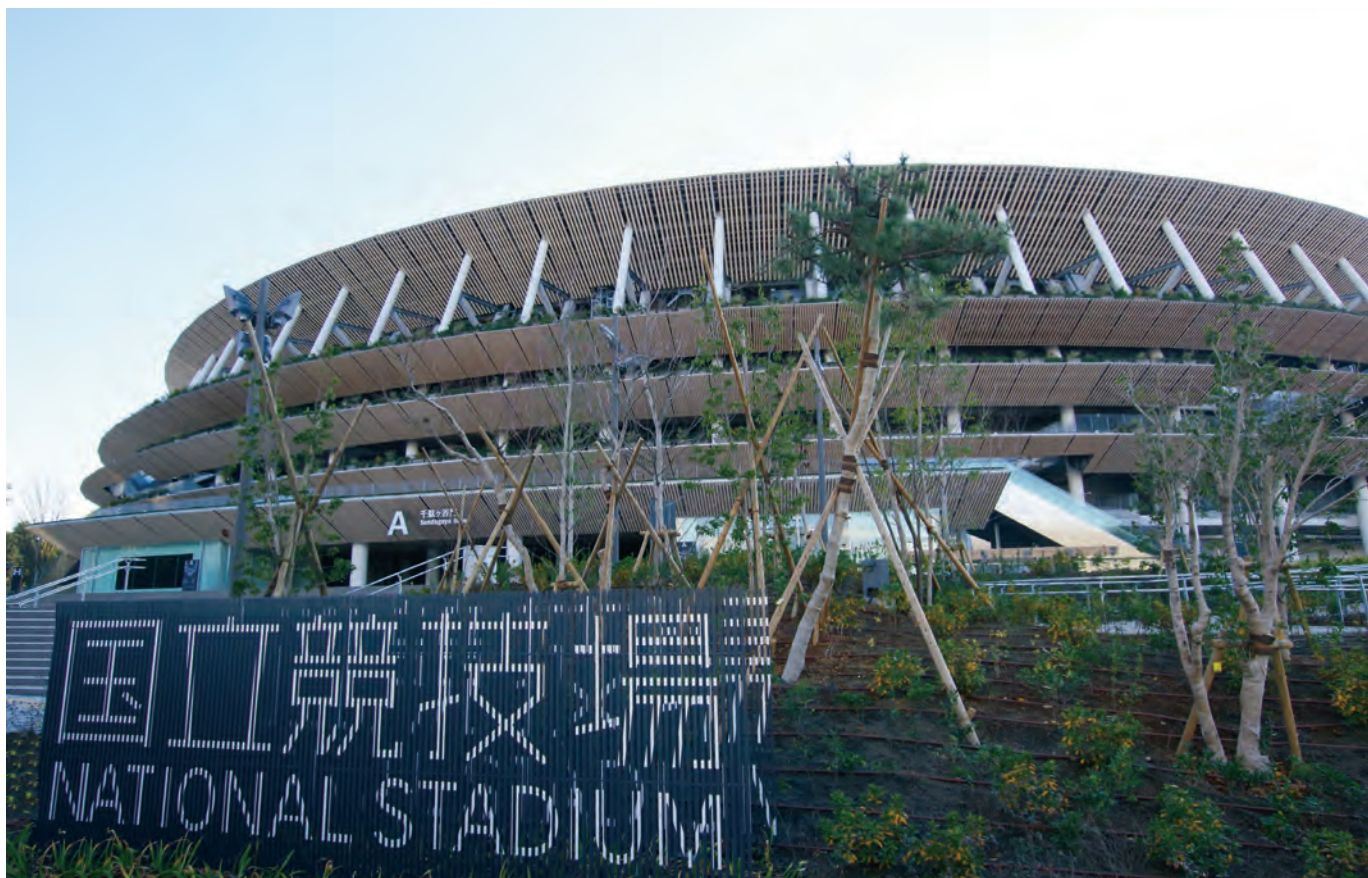
*... And Much More*

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# SODDING AT JAPAN NATIONAL STADIUM

Translated and written by Fumi Miyachi



The Japan National Stadium in Tokyo, Japan, was the site of many events for the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics that were postponed to 2021.

TPI (Turfgrass Producers International) Class A member, Chubu Co., Ltd, of Tottori, Japan, harvested and installed bermudagrass big roll sod multiple times during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics held in 2021 at the Japan National Stadium, Tokyo, Japan.

Founded in 1963, Chubu has long been producing sand-grown bermudagrass in Tottori, Japan. Because the bermudagrass is grown on the ideal dune sand suitable for sports fields, Chubu's bermudagrass big roll sod gained popularity in the Japanese sports field market.

When Japan was selected as the host of both the Rugby World Cup 2019 and the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games 2020, Chubu started searching for the turfgrass variety suitable for these games. Eventually, Chubu became an authorized grower for TifSport, TifGrand, and TifTuf bermudagrasses in Japan.

## Understanding the Grass Called "Tifton"

When the Japanese government selected the grass for the National Stadium rebuilding project, they had to ensure the transparency of the publicly funded project. Therefore, the grass for the field was selected from the non-patented common grasses so that any company could procure the grass and submit a bid to supply it for the project. As a result, the non-certified bermudagrass called "Tifton" was selected as it was the least expensive material and has been commonly used in most athletic fields in Japan.

Some people who are knowledgeable about turfgrass varieties might have wondered, "What is Tifton grass?" or "Do you mean Tifway?"

"Tifton" grass in Japan is also called "Japanese Tifway" or "Japanese 419," among some of the American turfgrass specialists or breeders. Dr. Earl Elsner, the former University of Georgia (UGA) turfgrass professor, visited a production field of the "Tifton" grass when he inspected some fields in Japan. Dr. Elsner said, "This is not a true

Georgia Tifway.” He was able to easily identify the difference between certified Tifway and the Japanese Tifton grass by their morphological appearance.

“Tifton” grass is the non-certified hybrid bermudagrass, similar to Tifgreen (Tifton 328) in appearance, which is grown mainly in the southern part of Japan and is commercially available almost anywhere in the region. Originally, it might have been brought in from the United States by several trading companies, but the grass had been propagated, reproduced, and transferred by numerous farmers in the southern island called “Kyushu” over several decades without stringent turfgrass variety certification programs to ensure the genetic purity. Eventually, the grass became standardized in Japan and is now commonly called “Tifton.” It could be 328 or it could be an evolving mutant. The name of “Tifton” alone spread like wildfire. There are no turf farms or research institutes in Japan who can identify the precise evolution of the grass called “Tifton.” But they all call it “Tifton.” All Japanese bermudagrass producers believe that the “Tifton” grass they grow was originally from Tifton, Georgia, USA.

Until Chubu became a licensee for the UGA turfgrass varieties, which includes participation in the ITGAP (International Turfgrass Genetic Assurance Program), no turfgrass certification program had existed in Japan. As a result, Chubu become the first and only Japanese sod producer adopting ITGAP, the internationally recognized turfgrass certification program.

## Resodding Scheduled at National Stadium

Japan’s newly rebuilt National Stadium had an opening ceremony in December of 2019. As mentioned earlier, the field was initially sodded with the Tifton grass. Since its opening, the field already had been resodded twice and was again resodded a couple of times during and after the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Initially, the non-certified bermudagrass called “Tifton” was sodded in July of 2019. After the stadium’s opening ceremony, the field turfgrass maintenance was taken over from the general contractor by the local turfgrass management company that had been determined by the public bidding.

In October of 2020, the National Stadium hosted the live music concert of the famous Japanese boy band called “Arashi.” The event was named “Arafes 2020 at National Stadium.”

Even though this “Arafes 2020 at National Stadium” had no audience due to the Covid-19 restrictions, the field had been damaged by the traffic related to this event.



Density was a key characteristic of the grasses selected for the Japan National Stadium.

Under the turf maintenance provided by the private company, the selection of the turfgrass for the field was left to the head groundskeeper’s discretion. The head groundskeeper of the Olympic Stadium and Chubu have been working closely for more than a decade in several venues across Japan. The groundskeeper has been visiting Chubu’s production fields in Tottori frequently to check whether there’s any other better turfgrass varieties available or not. The head groundskeeper learned about the two UGA varieties, TifSport and TifGrand, and

**Table 1. Big Roll Sodding Scheduled for Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics Games.**

	Grass or Variety Name	Date to resod
1st	Tifton (Non-certified) from Tottori	<b>July 2019</b> Before the stadium opening ceremony
2nd	ITGAP-certified TifSport from Tottori	<b>December 2020</b> After the music concert Arafes 2020
3rd	Tifton (Non-certified) from Hokota, Ibaraki	<b>July 25, 2021</b> Right after the opening ceremony of Olympic Games
4th	ITGAP-certified TifGrand from Hokota, Ibaraki	<b>August 25, 2021</b> Right after the opening ceremony of Paralympic Games
5th	ITGAP-certified TifGrand from Tottori	<b>October 5, 2021</b> Following the conclusion of Paralympic Games



witnessed their quality during several Rugby World Cup venues in 2019. He decided to use both of them during the various resoddings scheduled at the Olympic Stadium during and after the Tokyo 2020 games.

After “Arafes 2020 at National Stadium,” the second resodding was carried out in December of 2020. The spent and worn Tifton was removed and the second field grass, the certified TifSport big roll sod, was selected and harvested in Tottori. It was shipped to Tokyo and quickly rolled out on the field of the Olympic Stadium in December of 2020.

As of July 21, 2021, the field grass was the certified TifSport Bermudagrass and that would be maintained until after the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics 2020 held on July 23, 2021.

### Chubu Co. Acts to Ensure the Stadium’s Grass Quality

During the Tokyo 2020 games, the overnight resodding was scheduled a couple of times. However, Chubu’s Tottori field is about 450 miles away from the National Stadium. The average daytime temperature in the Tokyo region from late July to late August could easily reach 39 degrees C (102 F) or higher. Keeping the sod fresh during the shipment was the biggest concern.

To minimize the heat stress during the shipping, and to keep the freshness of the big roll sod under the severe hot and humid summer conditions, **Hideki Ikemoto, Vice President, Chubu Co., Ltd**, made a well-considered determination. He decided to build a new, dedicated, sand-capped field in Hokota city, Ibaraki prefecture, which is a suburb of Tokyo, near the Tokyo-Narita International Airport. Hokota Nursery is strategically located just 68 miles away from the National Stadium. The big rolls for the third and fourth overnight resoddings were shipped from this Hokota field.



The Chubu Co. built a new, dedicated, sand-capped field in Hokota City strategically located just 68 miles away from the National Stadium.

To support the Olympic and Paralympic overnight sodding, Chubu Co. shipped TifGrand and Tifton big rolls from the Tottori field and laid them at the Hokota field. These big rolls were maintained on plastic for several weeks to enable the overnight stadium renovation. Thus, the Hokota field played a role as the base for the National Stadium overnight resodding.

### The Resodding Procedures

Right after the opening ceremony of the Olympics, which took place on July 23, anticipating that the TifSport would be damaged, the entire field surface was stripped out.

Harvesting the thick cut “Tifton” big roll sod started at the Hokota field at approximately 5 pm and was completed around 5 am the next morning. As the harvest of each roll was completed, crew members marked the length of that roll on the surface of the plastic wrapping film so that the installation crews could identify the length at a glance to enable more efficient installation.



The harvested sod arrives at National Stadium, ready for the installation to begin.

The big rolls were loaded into the trucks and shipped from Hokota to the National Stadium in Tokyo. Installation began at 6 pm Japanese local time on July 25, 2021. This Tifton big roll sod would remain as the field surface until the end of the Olympic Games in late August.

The Paralympic Games took place after the Olympic Games, with the Paralympic Opening Ceremony held on August 24, 2021. Chubu removed the spent Tifton Bermudagrass, which had been the third field surface, and installed ITGAP-certified TifGrand big rolls as the fourth replacement. The late August one-night removal and installation project was accomplished in only a few hours by the experienced installation crews.



This certified TifGrand Bermudagrass had been scheduled to remain as the field surface at the Japan National Stadium after the Paralympic games had been completed. However, due to the physical surface damage to the field caused by the Paralympic games, a fifth resodding was set for October 5, 2021. The big roll sod selected was again the ITGAP-certified TifGrand which will remain as the stadium's field surface.



The Chubu Co. crew members involved in the resodding projects pose for a photo on the field of Japan National Stadium.

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Winners from tables will be entered to win additional prizes including a Grand Prize of \$1000!

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Throughout this entire process of multiple resoddings, the goal of the Chubu Co. was to provide the best possible surface to support the athletes. We, as a company and as individuals, were honored to have the opportunity to show the benefits and beauty of natural grass to a world-wide audience.



Harvesting is underway at the Hokota field.



The harvest of this big roll is nearly completed.



Harvesting continues.



One of the big rolls of harvested sod is picked up by the forklift.



A crew member marks the length of the sod roll on the wrapping film.



The harvested rolls with the roll length written on the wrapping film are ready for loading.

The information for this article and the pictures were provided by Eiji Ota, Masao Koshiba, Hideki Ikemoto, Shigeaki Yamada, Akira Mibu, and Shinnosuke Ota of Chubu Co., Ltd, Tottori, Japan. This article was translated and written by Fumi Miyachi, appointed coordinator, International and Next-Gen Solutions, Chubu Co., Ltd., based at the company's Tokyo Headquarters. Fumi has represented the company, and Japan, and served as translator for other company representatives during past TPI International Conferences in 2002 and in 2018.

Note: A YouTube video of the big roll sod installation that took place at Japan National Stadium on July 17, 2019, was shared by SIDEKICK. The following link leads to that video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQZH00i1zmo>

