Star Tribune (Minneapolis - St. Paul)
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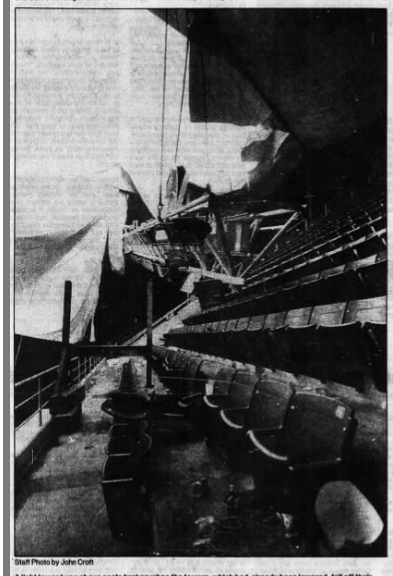
The dome is down

Staff Photo by Stormi Greener

The dome no longer blocked the view of the Minneapolis skyline.



Staff Photo by John Croft

A light tower hung above seats broken when the towers, which had already been lowered, fell off their metal braces.

SHOOT: 7 holes drained roof

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air to melt the snow.

As at the Metrodome, snow, slush and melted snow began to collect in depressions on the roof surface, McFadden said. Building engineers were advised not to increase the inside air pressure to pop out the depressions because there was a temporary, presumably weakened, panel in the roof that might rupture.

"We tried all kinds of things, including shoveling snow out of the depressions and over the sides, but that's kind of a drop in the bucket," McFadden said in a telephone interview yesterday.

Out of desperation, he said, Richard Storm, director of energy programs and engineering services for the university, went home and grabbed his gun.

"We shot about four holes in four different spots where we thought the weight was centered," McFadden said. "Nothing happened because there was no water up there. It was all snow. Then, about a half-hour to 45 minutes later, water started to drain out of one of them." The snow was melting.

By Tuesday morning, water was draining from the four holes. But three new puddles had formed and were expanding, McFadden said. "So we shot three more holes. That was the sign of the dome," McFadden recounted.

Storm, the maintenance engineer-turned-marksman said the water pouring through the holes tore the fabric more, producing larger holes for more rapid drainage. "You can't drain thousands of gallons through a little hole," Storm said. "You have to have some tearing."

It was not the first time Storm has gone hunting for water pools on the roof of the Dakota Dome. In October, a snowstorm ruptured a panel and the roof deflated. Big ponds of water formed on two panels, Storm said.

"When you have a panel that is terribly overloaded, you don't know when it might fall and you can't put somebody up on them. So we did it remotely," Storm said.

Shooting roofs out of season is not the most desirable solution, Storm said. "We don't like to do that because it tears after that. It puts about a foot tear in it and we have to patch it."

He said workers will patch the bullet wounds on the roof "in the next few days." The tears are not large enough to affect the air pressure that supports the dome, he said.

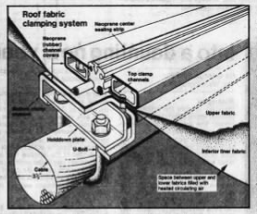
The Dakota Dome's roof covers four acres. The Metrodome's is almost 10 acres. Both are made of Teflon-coated fiberglass panels produced by Birdair Structures in Buffalo, N.Y.

And both roofs have come down before. The Dakota Dome was first inflated in September 1978. A blizzard forced it down in March 1979 and it went down again last October in a snowstorm. The Metrodome fell under the weight of heavy snow in November 1981.

McFadden said the panel that ruptured in October was temporarily repaired and the dome reinflated within 70 hours. A new panel has been delivered to the campus and will replace the repaired one soon, he said.

Staff Photo by Tom Sweeney

Donald Poss, right, executive director of the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission, and his assistant, Jerry Bell, explained the collapse at a press conference.



GAME: Vikes set deadline

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game. He could order us to play where he thought it would be in the best interest of the NFL."

Lynn said the Vikings informed Rozelle of the situation yesterday. "We told him of the timetable for repairing the roof," Lynn said. "We know more about this situation than the commissioner or anyone in his office. He's relying on us to advise him."

According to Lynn, no decision has been made on a specific alternate game site.

"The only thing we told the commissioner is that we don't want to play the game in Dallas under any conditions," Lynn said. "We have an opportunity to finish fourth in the conference or eighth, depending on this game. We would lose the home advantage by moving to a neutral site, but it would be more of a disadvantage playing in Dallas."

Tex Schramm, the Cowboys' president and general manager, said he hoped Rozelle would make a decision on the game site before Saturday night. And, Schramm added, "I'd like the game right here (in Texas Stadium in Irving)."

Schramm told the Dallas Morning News that he thinks Rozelle will make a decision today. "We can't wait to see if it works or not," he said of repairing the Metrodome. "This will be a judgment made by the league, but we can't wait until Sunday to see if it blows up."

Lynn noted that when the Metrodome roof deflated Nov. 19, 1981, a replacement panel arrived at 3 a.m. Nov. 22. It was put in place by 5 p.m. that day and the dome was reinflated by 6:15 p.m., Lynn said.

ABC-TV technicians and equipment are scheduled to arrive in Minneapolis today, Lynn said. If the game can't be played in Minneapolis, he said, the Vikings want it moved to another domed stadium. And the Silverdome, home of the Detroit Lions, would involve the shortest trip for the TV people.

However, ABC has technicians and equipment in New Orleans for the Sugar Bowl, which will be played Saturday night. Lynn said it might be feasible to keep that TV crew in New Orleans if the Vikings-Cowboys game were moved to the Superdome.

Meanwhile, the Vikings resumed practice yesterday in their air-supported practice bubble, which is made of the same fabric as the Metrodome. The bubble, located at the Vikings' Eden Prairie training complex, wasn't damaged this week.

"Of all the people involved, we're affected the least," Coach Bud Grant said. "The people affected by this are the many who planned to come to this game."

REPAIR: Fabric needed

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of 12-foot-wide swatches of coated fabric are heat-sealed. Then the material is cut to the proper size. It is cooled so it can be unrolled from the crate in the correct position.

The fabric will be flown from Buffalo to Minneapolis in a cargo plane. It will be installed by a special crew headed by Larry Keese, Birdair's site supervisor, called to Minneapolis when a small tear appeared in the roof after Tuesday's 10.5-inch snowstorm.

Keese's work crew will consist of Birdair engineers and workers, as well as employees of the sports commission.

The roof's 108 fabric panels are clamped to steel cables, 3½ inches thick, that criss-cross the roof of the stadium. A neoprene shield and the tightness of the clamps keeps air from leaking out.

Clamps are used because they don't pierce the fabric.

The major imponderable in the repair program is weather. Bad weather could force Birdair to ship the panel by truck instead of by plane, which could delay the start of installation, and bad weather in the Twin Cities could handicap the work crew.

Low temperatures would be no problem, said Donald Poss, sports commission executive director, at a press conference yesterday. But wind, sleet or snow could make it difficult for the workers clambering around the roof to clamp the new panel in place.

National Weather Service stations in the Twin Cities and Buffalo were forecasting no significant snow this weekend.

Spiller isn't worried. She already has a bet that the Vikings will beat the Dallas Cowboys Monday night. Obviously, she wouldn't risk her money if she didn't think the Vikings would have the advantage of playing on their home field.

She has a whole dollar riding on the game.

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