

NFL PLAYERS WRITE TURF INTO CONTRACT

In the future, all open-dome stadiums will be natural turf if the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA) reaches agreement with the NFL owners during negotiations for a new three-year contract. NFLPA has asked for conversion of all outdoor stadiums with artificial turf to natural turf and a ban on artificial turf at future open-air stadiums. The group made a similar request for its previous contract but dropped the issue during a last minute compromise.

John Macik, sports medicine coordinator for the NFLPA, has conducted surveys on field-related injuries at NFL stadiums in preparation for the negotiations. His results indicate that artificial surfaces were responsible for twice as many career-threatening injuries as natural turf. Macik has also reported players greatly prefer natural turf.

NFLPA has also asked for a joint-sponsored safety study of many different areas of professional football. The study would evaluate safety of fields, equipment and programs during mini-camps and training camps. "The players are seriously concerned about anything that can permanently harm them and shorten their careers," states Macik. "We have the data to prove to the owners that natural is safer. In many cases, the owners (of the teams) do not own their home stadium. NFLPA believes the own-

ers, as important stadium tenants, have sufficient influence to have fields converted to natural turf."

At presstime, the negotiators have failed to reach agreement. The players went on strike September 21. The owners cancelled all scheduled games for one week and have said they will field teams the following week consisting of players willing to cross the picket lines and those who were cut before the season started. "The only thing we have reached agreement on so far is the length of the contract," said Dee Rauch, NFLPA's public affairs officer.

GROUND BROKEN FOR SPORTS TURF CENTER

The first two acres of turf research plots have been installed by University of Missouri staff at Powell Gardens in Lone Jack, MO, to begin development of a National Sports Turf Research Center. The University is working in cooperation with the \$80 million Powell Foundation and DuraTurf Enterprises Inc. of Leawood, KS, to develop a facility on a 240 acre site east of Kansas City to serve as a center for U.S. sports turf research.

Dr. David Minner from the university's department of horticulture in Columbia, planned and supervised construction of the first plots in August. A two-acre site was

graded and irrigation was installed before a variety of sports turf root zones were seeded. Minner plans to place the various root zones and types of turfgrass under an assortment of maintenance and wear tests. Minner and his staff operate out of two construction trailers, one containing a small soils laboratory.

Construction of the first permanent building should begin this spring, according to David Doherty, president of DuraTurf. His company will pay for the 14,000 square foot building to contain a state-of-the-art soil testing laboratory, classrooms, offices, a small dormitory, and equipment storage. The company will make the facilities available to the university for research and teaching. A computer data bank of sports turf specifications and research results will also be available both nationally and internationally.

Doherty hopes to provide a 48-hour turnaround soil testing service as soon as the lab is completed. "Who can wait two to three weeks for results of a soil test?" asks Doherty. "Sports turf managers should test their soil frequently and that means they need results quickly."

Minner has completed the first grant proposal for the Center asking for \$460,000 over a three-year period from the state's Research Assistance Act. The funds would be used to conduct research at the Lone Jack facility. He plans to apply for a federal grant as well.

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"The idea is to select the best performing combinations of root zone and turfgrass from the research plots and use them to construct between two and five football/soccer fields as soon as possible," explains Doherty. "We want our young athletes to play all out on these state-of-the-art fields to show us which is the safest and most durable. Comprehensive data will be kept on each field and made available to the public. Then, for once, we won't have to keep repeating the same mistakes at the expense of our kids' knees, ankles and shoulders."

CHICAGO TO INSTALL NATURAL TURF AT SOLDIER FIELD

The Chicago Park District has agreed to replace the eight-year-old AstroTurf in Soldier Field with natural turf after repeated requests by the Chicago Bears. Natural turf was considered when the current field was installed in 1979 but lost a price struggle to the artificial surface. Two years ago the Bears asked again for natural turf when it became apparent the resiliency of the pad under the field was failing. General Manager Michael McCaskey has consistently stated that he wants the Bears, "To play on real green grass under the blue sky."

Astroturf Industries has been testing the resiliency of the field every summer. Ken Mrock, supervisor of maintenance for the stadium and six golf courses for the Chicago Park District, explains that gas bubbles originally contained in the pad have ruptured making the field harder. Mrock keeps the field covered most of the time to prevent moisture from getting into the pad and freezing during cold weather. He also blows heated air from Kerosene heaters under the tarp to soften the pad for winter games.

Bears management, especially coach Mike Ditka, have not concealed their intention to build another stadium in the Chicago area. Difficulty finding the right location has delayed the move and the team's lease at Soldier Field extends into the 1990s. Once a site and financing are obtained, it would take three or more years to build. Joe Robbie's success in Miami building a privately-financed stadium has encouraged Bears management.

"The stadium has been renovated and is in good shape except for the field," explains Mrock. It currently seats 66,000 fans and has 65 skyboxes. "There's not a bad seat in the house. It's tough to find a location as good as Soldier Field." The stadium is situated on Lake Michigan near the Loop and McCormick Place.

"I'd like to see natural turf," says Mrock. "It's not my decision to make, but that's my opinion. You can tell the players and

coaches like it better. That should be worth something when you compare the cost of one against the other."

BOARDWALK AND BASEBALL PREPARES FOR THE ROYALS



Kansas City Royals General Manager John Schuerholz (left) and Boardwalk & Baseball President Dick Howard examine a model of the 6,500-seat stadium to host the Royals for spring training in 1988. The facility is 25 minutes from Orlando, Florida.

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