New System Enters Old Debate

Natural grass has proved to be the decisive winner in the debate over artificial vs. natural turf athletic surfaces. Over the past two decades, facilities that had converted their fields to artificial surfaces have been gradually returning to natural turf.

Recently, a new field construction system entered the debate to make it more interesting. The GrassMaster system offers a unique compromise to an issue that was previously black and white.

Holland-based Desso DLW began developing the GrassMaster system in Europe almost a decade ago. The system uses the same polypropylene thread fiber used to construct synthetic turf, but it weaves the material into a specially prepared, natural-grass field. The new field retains natural-turf benefits that players desire, while it gains durability to withstand high-use schedules.

To realize this new concept in sports turf, Desso DLW adapted the same machinery used to create artificial turf in the factory. Instead of threading polypropylene fibers onto a backing cloth, GrassMaster injects tufts of the same material directly into a natural-turf surface.

The system implants fibers up to 20 centimeters into the ground at two-centimeter intervals over the entire field. On average, only three fibers are injected for every 97 blades of natural grass.

The fibers are shorter than the surrounding natural grass, and they blend unnoticeably into the stand. Below the surface, they become permanently entwined in the rootzone.

Shortly after installation, the field is ready for high-intensity use. The new pitch provides playability that's comparable to natural turf, and it requires similar maintenance.

GrassMaster's biggest selling point is its durability. Desso DLW claims that its system prepares a field to handle approximately 800 hours of soccer training/matches per year. Treated fields should be continuously available for use, except under snow and freezing conditions. The synthetic fibers even help maintain the field's color as the season progresses.

Until recently, this technology was applied exclusively in Europe. But success stories on soccer fields in Holland, Germany, and Scandinavia have sparked interest in Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, and now the new technique has found its way to the United States.

Binghamton Municipal Stadium will open the first GrassMaster field in the Nation for play this spring. The Eastern League's Binghamton Mets are used to playing on a quality surface; you may remember the field as the 1994-95 recipient of the Beam Clay/*sportsTURF*/STMA Professional Baseball Diamond of the Year Award.

This will be a good first test for the system, since the installation field has already been validated for its outstanding quality. With other big names, such as the New York Giants, looking into the GrassMaster system, this could mark the beginning of an important new trend in athletic field construction.

Steve Berens, Editor
(847) 427-3005

Tip o' the Month

Eliminate Your Corners

by Floyd Perry

Since 1839, when Alexander Cartwright created our national pastime in Hoboken, NJ, square corners have been a fact of life on fields at all levels of play. Unfortunately, this poses problems for grounds crews, since you can't drag square corners with a three-wheeled vehicle and a pull-behind drag.

To beat the clock and field conditions, we need to look to other options for success. Some progressive groundskeepers have created changes which go against the diagrams, but work in the real world:

Double, turf-covered circles six-foot in diameter allow four hitters to go at the same time.

An oblong, ovular fungo area allows hitters and fielders to stay in the same area without turf tear-out.

Continued on pg. 38