

Rotational field worth taking a look

Unique design reduces wear and tear, improves playability and safety

BY KIMBERLY SAUNDERS

With the growing interest in team sports among all ages and levels of play, the demand for time on traditional playing fields has escalated, particularly for soccer. Daily team practices, eight-to-ten game weekend schedules, and pick-up games when the fields are "not in use" are becoming quite common. As a result, these fields are exposed to an abundance of tough play from season to season, all year long.

In addition to standard turf management issues such as mowing, fertilizing, and striping of the lines, field maintenance crews must often contend with torn and bare turf areas, holes, and rock-hard exposed patches of clay that develop in the high traffic areas. These "wear zones" are most apparent in or around the goalkeepers' boxes and on the sidelines of traditional rectangular fields. This includes soccer, lacrosse, rugby, and field hockey fields.

The areas between the 20-yard line and the goal line on a practice football field also tend to develop "wear zones." Rain only worsens the problem. Combined, these poor conditions can result in some very unpleasant playing environments, canceled or rescheduled games, or physical injuries to players.

Remediating these problems to maintain a competitive playing field is costly and time consuming, as *Sportsturf* know. Necessary repairs, both during and following seasonal play, are often short-lived. Immature or new grass is inevitably trampled and worn out before it reaches a mature state sufficient to fill in the bare areas.

New idea

Bob Steinhaus, president of Pioneer Fields, Pittsburgh, and fellow founder Matthew Butch have come up with a practical solution for preserving natural turf fields that requires less maintenance and provides for safer, year-round play.

"We call it the Rotational Athletic Field. The design incorporates a rectangular athletic playing field fitted within a substantially circular turf area. The uniquely graded circular area can essentially be scaled to fit any size rectangular playing field, traditional or nontraditional, with some buffer space," explains Steinhaus. "The playing field rotates at select times throughout the season of play to limit the amount of play in high traffic areas or to avoid damaged or unsafe turf. The rotation schedule can range from daily, which may only be necessary in certain instances, such as following a rough game in heavy rains, to just three times a year which would be practical for seasonal play and seasonal turf repairs," he says.

"This rotation of field layout not only allows for the newly repaired areas of turf to be established off of the current field of play but, more importantly, to be developed before play resumes on that section of field. When rotated accordingly throughout the playing season, the major wear zones on a field are reduced in severity and new, lush turf areas can be quickly established," adds Butch.

Because it takes approximately 10 weeks to grow turf to a mature, playable stage, such repairs are typically performed during the off-season. Using the rotational athletic field design allows bare spots and torn turf areas to be almost completely repaired, resulting in a practically new field at every rotation.

"To be able to adjust where the field of play is situated without physically moving the field is truly innovative," says Mark Dargy, an irrigation specialist with E.H. Griffith, a major Toro distributor. "Most people agree that maintenance is the biggest problem with natural turf fields. The rotational athletic field concept not only saves time and money in the short term on maintenance, but potentially extends the playing life of every field."

Mike DiJirolanio, a sales representative with United Horticultural Supply, agrees. "A rotational athletic field certainly improves playability. I can see it also improving safety by decreasing the possibility of injuries to athletes due to worn turf areas that become rock hard in fair weather then muddy and slippery when it rains," he says.

Incorporating rotation of play also eliminates the need for constructing two or more regular fields in order to gain a fresh field, Steinhaus points out.

"This saves the initial costs in constructing extra fields and it would also reduce the costs in a maintenance budget plan from two or more regular fields to one. The design is especially practical where open field space is limited and, in many circumstances, the possibility exists to adapt the design to an existing traditional field."

The idea is so simple yet extremely practical and that is why Steinhaus and Butch have filed an application with the U.S. Patent Office with full intent on receiving a patent on the concept. Log onto www.pioneerfields.com to learn more.

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Circle 127 on Inquiry Card



A natural setting with one field position lined off for play. Obviously only one field would be lined off at any given time.