

# Painting a masterpiece

How to turn your  
football field into  
a work of art

BY JOHN KMITTA, SENIOR EDITOR

**T**he surface is many times larger than a standard 18- by 24-inch artist's canvas; it is green instead of white; and it is destined to get wet, dirty, and trampled. Despite these challenges, a football field is the turf manager's blank slate. Each week, that slate is filled with the precise white lines, colorful end zones, and specialty logos that become a masterpiece of functionality.

When painting a field, several factors must come together to determine whether the end result will be a masterwork—set up steps, tools, application methods, the climate and, of course, the paint.

According to Carbit Paint Company, a Chicago-based manufacturer of natural turf marking paint, users should prepare natural turf surfaces by removing old paint with sweep brooms and high-pressure water. If the application is seasonal, no preparation is typically required.

According to Abby McNeal, CSFM, assistant turfgrass manager at Invesco Field at Mile High, you must determine the dimensions that you will be painting before setting up to paint.

"You need to first make a plan as to how you are going to paint the field," said McNeal. "It is important to take the time to think about it so that you do not track back across painted lines. Gather all of your painting strings, check all of your equipment, and finalize the method of painting with the crew."

McNeal also recommends having towels on hand in case a spill or mistake happens. A cart with paint (for refilling the machines) should also have a bucket of water and a toolbox with extra tips, nozzles, and miscellaneous tools.

## Tools, paint and application

"Tools that we use to paint a football field include strings that are approximately 170 feet long and strings that are 370 feet long," said McNeal. "We use an 8-inch wide piece of cardboard to make sure we get the gap between the end of the yard line and the sideline. A Graco 3900 Line Lazer is the painting machine that we use. We have it set up so that we can use up to three 150-foot hoses. We are fortunate to use line stencils that are exactly 4 inches wide and 15 feet long, creating a stencil effect when we paint our yard lines. We also have an 8-inch wide stencil to create the goal line."

Kevin Dawkins, senior crew leader of Raymond James Stadium, said he typically mixes paint with water at a 1-to-1 ratio.

McNeal uses World Class paint diluted at a ratio of one part paint to one part water.



Precise field lines are created by running string from end zone to end zone.

- Photo courtesy of Suntec Paint, Inc.



"The amount of paint used on a particular day is determined by the event for which we are painting," said McNeal. "We stretch painting out over three days for football. So the day depends on how much paint we use. By the time the field is game day ready, we have used about 25 five-gallon buckets of paint (at the one to one ratio). We want the brightness for television, and this is how we get it."

Dawkins recommends putting down a white background before painting over it with color to provide enhanced brightness.

According to Carbit, when using a compressed air sprayer, adjust reduction with water to obtain a uniform pattern. Use a tank pressure of 100 psi and a fluid pressure of 30 psi. Reduce with water for desired consistency. For a heavy line, reduce with 1 1/2 parts water to one part paint. For remarking, reduce with 2 1/2 parts water to one part paint. When using a gas-operated piston pump sprayer, reduce seven parts water to three parts paint. When using airless spray, reduce 10 percent with water and apply at tip pressure of 2,000-2,500 psi with orifice tip size of .018 inch to .021 inch.

### Time to paint

"We start on a Wednesday and finish on a Saturday, and that is two coats of everything," said Dawkins. "If there is a call for rain, we like to find out how much is being called for before it does rain. The paint is dry within an hour and fifteen minutes, so if we get a window like that, we will go ahead and paint, even if it is calling for rain. Rain doesn't damage it too much, unless you put it down right before it rains. Most of the time it leaves some of it there. That way we don't have



Paint should be applied at a recommended spread rate by spray, brush or roller.

- Photo courtesy of Suntec Paint, Inc.

to go over the whole routine again, we just brighten up what washed off."

For a Sunday NFL game, McNeal also starts on Wednesday with the framing of the field and the outside media lines. Thursdays are for end zones, logos, and the first coat of the 6-foot border. Friday is used to finish the field, yard lines, numbers, hash marks, and another coat on the border. Saturday is used to paint in case weather impacted the painting schedule earlier in the week. Saturday's can also be used to paint one more coat on the border.

"We are always looking at the weather during a game week," said McNeal. "It dictates so much, from tarping to painting, that we must always keep updated as the week progresses."

Carbit recommends applying field paint when air, product and surface temperatures are above 50 degrees Fahrenheit and at least 5 degrees Fahrenheit above the dew point. In average weather—77 degrees Fahrenheit, and 50 percent relative humidity—Carbit's paint dries to the touch in 30 minutes, and is hard in one to two hours.

### Quality results

"Don't be afraid to experiment with different methods and ways of doing things," said McNeal. "Make your ultimate goal to frame the turf that you spend so much time working on look even better with a great paint job. Use the best paint that you can afford. The cheapest isn't always the best for your turf, so remember to test the paint before you go for the gusto."

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