

president's message

Facing challenges

"Until man can duplicate a blade of grass nature will laugh at his so-called scientific knowledge." Thomas Edison

Sports turf managers are used to challenges. We face them every day in one form or another. The trend of artificial turf field installations, including replacement of natural turf fields with artificial turf systems, has added yet another challenge for our profession. As sports turf professionals, we must be a source of facts when decisions are made about installing a specific type of turf. Installation decisions made today produce the playing surfaces that we will be managing tomorrow and for years to come.

Surveys show that a good natural grass field is still the overwhelming preference of players and fans alike. However, as we are aware, no grass surface will withstand unlimited use and still provide the desired playing conditions. As professionals, our goal is to provide the best playing surface possible for all levels of play, regardless of the surface involved.

We must look at these new systems not as a threat, but as another tool that can help us do our jobs better. The new turf systems are clearly superior to the old artificial turf. There exists a place for these surfaces, such as in an environment not conducive to natural grass or on fields that receive so much wear that it is impossible to adequately maintain a natural grass field.

Currently the marketing departments of installers and manufacturers are supplying most of the information on the new systems. Unfortunately, some field installation decisions are being based on this information with little or no input from the sports turf professional. I would encourage the companies marketing these artificial surfaces to recognize the professional turf managers at our facilities and accept us as the experts on our sites. STMs should expect to be a part of the decision-making process, and these companies can do a lot to further this ethical practice.

Much of the information about the new systems we hear today sounds very similar to that of the late 1960s and 1970s. Over time, we learned the strengths and weaknesses of those fields and that every option has both pros and cons. We have gone through the same learning process with sand-based natural grass fields. At this time we simply do not know how these new fields will perform and hold up over an extended period.

As an organization, STMA must assume a leadership role in gathering and disseminating information concerning artificial turf, just as we have with natural turf fields. We must take part in the discussions and learning process by providing facts and relevant research, by sharing our experiences with these surfaces, and by working with other turf-related associations to help compile the body of information on these surfaces. As sports turf managers, we must become aware of all of the issues related to all of the athletic field options so that we are adequately equipped to be involved in the decision-making process to

determine what type of field best fits our particular situations.

This process has begun. The SAFE Foundation has endorsed research on artificial turf systems currently being conducted by Dr. Andy McNitt at Penn State. UEFA has made available its artificial turf manual on their research results. I ask you, as professionals, to provide your input on this new generation.

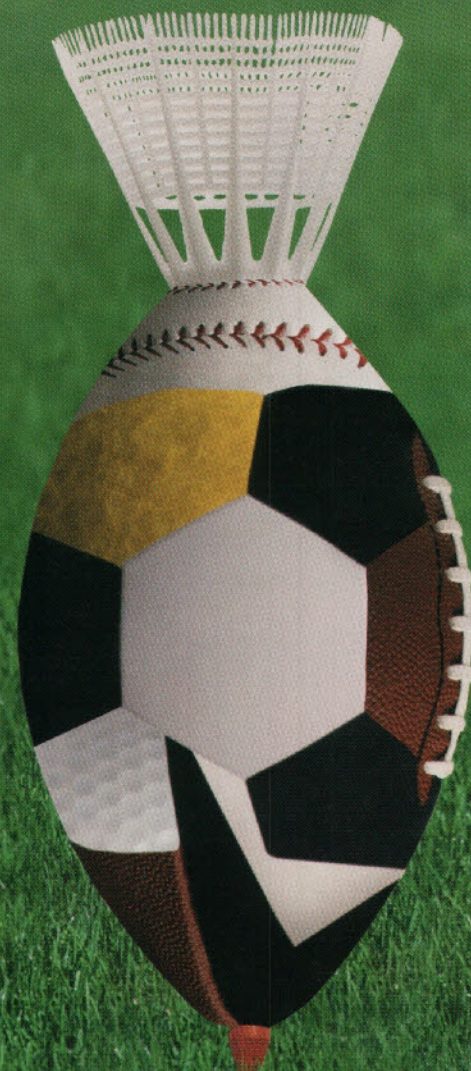
Bottom line: To ignore this issue is to do so at our own peril.



BOB CAMPBELL, CSFM

Bob

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