



Planning your new field project

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So you need a new field? Here are some guidelines that may help you in the process:

Form a team of representative areas that include all of the areas that may be affected with your field and its construction: Coaches, Maintenance, Architects, Facilities Management, Purchasing, Administration, and Planning Department. Meet with everyone to discuss your strategy before involving any vendors.

Determine what products and conditions your coaches are most willing to consider for the new field. After consulting with your team you can plan the project and develop a timeline. Be realistic as new construction does take a lot of time. For example, for a field to be completed in November '04, construction should have been started before March '04 with a planning start date of January '04. Design the timeline on a "worst case scenario" so you have a better chance of being on time. Do allow extra time for evaluations, inspections, grow-in (if natural grass), shipping, weather, and production schedules.

Look to local or national organizations that may have experts who can rid you of common field construction misconceptions. Any Certified Sports Field Managers (CSFM) and many other veteran turf managers will provide some realistic thoughts on your project that could save you some time and money.

Determine the development process to provide the Bid Documents and choosing an architect, or if you should send out requests for proposals (RFP) to several architects to get competitive pricing that may save you time and money.

Work through the actual construction strategy with the team taking into consideration the Planning, Excavations, Drainage, Soil Profile, and Field Surface. Through the architect your team can develop the necessary bid documents and specifications by determining the best materials for your site. This could involve the base preparation, soil profile, and surface material to fit the demands of severe weather and normal play.

Keep in mind that all athletic fields have specific lines of fair play and you should consider the areas out of bounds or in foul territory just as important as the field of play because most sports do not stop at the line. Most of these fields need 10-20 feet of area outside the lines for the sport to be played safely. These areas should be constructed and maintained on the same criteria as the playing field.

After the bid documents are presented, ask for each team member to review them for revisions before allowing the bid process to begin. Here is another good time to get an expert turf manager involved so he or she may be able to see the prints and specifications before going out to bid. I personally have been able to save many possible "Change Orders" from developing because there was a small discrepancy in the documents that may have made a "mountain out of a molehill."

Now it is time to formulate an estimated cost. Your architect may be able to help you with this or you may have to contact other organizations that have recently completed a similar project to give you a range for budgetary pricing. After developing a budget range, consider financial options, and make sure of any tax issues (as well as donations) to achieve your goal.

Also consider who will manage this project for you. This person must have a clear understanding of the performance, safety, and playability of the field. Do not underestimate this responsibility, as it is a full-time job and will consume lots of time if it is to be done correctly.

Now that you have a good set of bid documents and budget range, start researching the possible vendors that you will need to complete the project. Be sure to get input from your team on possible contractors they are familiar with. Get information that may pre-qualify them as responsible and competent athletic construction companies. Request a list of references, jobs completed and financial statements from all.

Have your team call several references and check the financial stability of the companies that you are to consider for this project. Analyze the results thoroughly and narrow the list to just those contractors you are willing to consider. Visit the sites of some of their previous projects. Take the coaches, players and appropriate staff along if possible to help evaluate the results of the completed projects and pre-qualify the contractors. Ask questions of the relevant people, who will give you a better insight of how the field will perform as far as maintenance and playability.

Release the bid documents to the approved contractors and analyze the results thoroughly before awarding the contract. The lowest bid is not always the best for your situation. You must look at all the information even after you have pre-qualified the contractors.

For example, the lowest bidder might have so much work scheduled they may not have the adequate personnel or equipment available. You must look at the potential contractor even deeper after the bid has been opened. Schedule a pre-construction meeting with the apparent winning contractor to discuss the logistics of the site, access to the site, staging, construction schedule, available personnel and equipment, testing, possible damage to adjacent areas. Evaluate the contractors' response before awarding a contract.

Your team may want to have an independent testing lab and a consultant available to confirm test results during construction. Schedule regular progress meetings and have a minimum of weekly reports filed from the contractor to help in determining the percent of work completed. This influx of information will also help in determining the amounts of payment draws the contractor may be able to receive.

Remember it is better to plan now than to rework later.

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