

irrigation/drainage

Town is flooded; field is dry

Normally April showers bring May flowers, but for much of Michigan, May 2004 will be remembered as one of the wettest months on record. The storms across many parts of the northern U.S. that month caused cancellations of hundreds of kids' athletic events because their fields were flood-

ed or a soggy mess.


During an early May weekend after more than 4 inches of rain fell in 48 hours in Olivet, MI, the sports complex at Olivet College was under 2 inches of standing water. Fifteen minutes after the rain stopped the synthetic turf football field was dry.

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In the same manner, the field shed another 6 inches of rain one week later, when even the city's storm sewers couldn't handle the load and main streets remained closed for days.

For Shelley Vollmar, athletic director of Carlson High School in Gibraltar, MI, the attention to the custom-engineered drainage base, coupled with the design of the field (GameDay Grass installed by General Sports Turf Systems) enabled activities to remain on schedule during the inclement weather. "The drainage was instant. Within 2 minutes the field was bone dry. The students were playing baseball, soccer, bocce ball and holding their gym classes on the football field because all the other regular turf was still muddy. The only reason we wouldn't have played on it is lightning," Vollmar said.

According to Charlie Cook of General Sports Turf, 15 percent of all synthetic fields have base failures due to settling and erosion on an improperly designed base. "The turf mirrors what the base provides," he said. "It's important to custom design the drainage base for each site to evaluate elements such as the soil composition, the nuclear geo compaction and existing storm drains and then plan accordingly. It's often the case that the existing conditions are not documented or are unknown. That's where we start our homework."

Cook designs a multi-level rock base with flat pipes in a V-shape heringbone system that ushers water from the field to the perimeter drain pipes. He keeps watch for any settling and/or expansion of the base that might compromise the turf's longevity. The quality of the base is what determines if the field will be playable in any weather, he says.

If you're considering a synthetic field, educate yourself thoroughly about base construction, materials, proper slope, drainage, installation speed, and response time, Cook advises. **ST**

General Sports Turf Systems provided this article. For more information, call Matt Felton at 248-601-2200.

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