

from the sidelines

Pragmatism prevails

The first time I set foot on an artificial surface was spring 1978 as a freshman at Penn State. A friend was playing intramural lacrosse on the "plastic;" another buddy and I took our baseball gloves so we could play catch while we watched the game. And yes, the bounces were perfect. I fielded balls like Dave Concepcion.

What began as part of the "8th Wonder of the World" (as the Houston Astrodome was called in the 1960s), AstroTurf and like products grew in popularity. But by the mid-1990s, many college and professional stadiums went back to natural grass, citing players' health as a deciding factor. Who can forget the story of Wendell Davis, a Chicago Bear wide receiver who went down on the notorious carpet at Veterans Stadium in Philadelphia and tore both ACLs at once?

Today new technology and innovation has made vogue the "Second Generation" of artificial turf surfaces. Even though the readers of SPORTSTURF can tell the difference between natural turf and the new generation of products, many fans from their seats or couches probably cannot.

Old schoolers and new schoolers always have preferred playing on real grass. But the demands put on playing surfaces from multiple users (and multiple revenue-producers don't forget) these days means more and more colleges, school districts, and park districts are considering the new synthetic products.

To their credit, most turf managers (and certainly the leaders of STMA) have gotten over any lingering annoyances they might have had with anything short of Mother Nature's wonderful product. The bottom line is, if you want to be a successful, knowledgeable turf manager today you have to investigate these new surface choices. You don't want your boss asking what you know if the answer's "nothing"!

A better idea is to learn all you can, from the manufacturers, research literature, your peers, this magazine, the STMA Conference, etc. The knowledge increases your value no matter where your career goes.

To that end, there are several interesting pieces in this issue. Beyond the numerous sessions on the topic that will be presented at the STMA Conference in Phoenix next January and are listed starting on page 14, please also turn to page 24. Here Dr. A.J. Powell from University of

Kentucky and Mike Andresen, CSFM, from Iowa State, with help from others, have put together a cutting edge article on the maintenance and management issues turf managers have experienced to date with the new generation of fields. Great stuff.

Finally, not to be outdone, Dr. Dave Minner, another Cyclone, in his "Q&A" on page 42, shares the results of his research into the importance of keeping rubber infill fields irrigated in the name of safety. Please check out this fresh information as well.



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