



Maintaining your synthetic field

By Troy Squires

The 3rd-generation turf revolution is well underway. Only a few years ago, installing 60-70 fields a year was considered a major breakthrough; now we do that many just in the month of June.

At the same time, we have some cause for concern.

It's related to the lack of maintenance on some of these new fields. In the beginning, infilled turf fields were being sold as "maintenance free." As many of you know, this simply isn't the case. What worries us at FieldTurf Tarkett is that some companies are still stressing that fields can go without much maintenance.

Do infilled turf fields reduce maintenance? Absolutely. They also reduce water and pesticide use, mowing, topdressing, etc. Are they maintenance-free? Sorry, but no way.

Our company provides a comprehensive maintenance manual to all of our clients. By following the maintenance procedures outlined in this manual, the field will be kept in optimum condition and the playing characteristics will be maintained longer. We have compared fields closely after years of heavy use and those that get consistent, thorough maintenance simply look and play better over time when compared to fields that get little or no maintenance.

First, let's talk about "break in." After installation, your field surface may feel softer than anticipated. Full penetration of the infill between the grass fibers and its subsequent settling into a uniform playing surface

will occur naturally over time with normal rainfall and initial use of the field. Depending on climatic conditions, this "settling in" period usually reaches its optimum, generally after 2 to 3 months of use, maybe less. After this period the field will stabilize to perform according to design specifications.

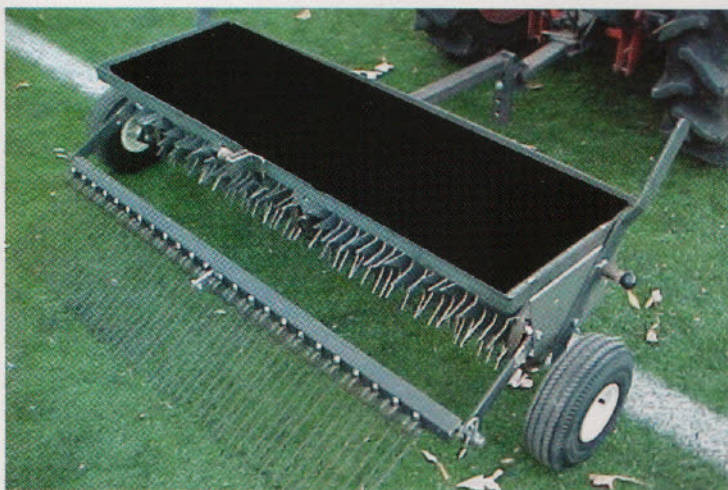
To maintain optimum performance and appearance of your field, the following maintenance procedures must be performed regularly using the recommended maintenance equipment. One maintenance ally you have, as usual, is a good soak of rain:

Litter removal

Use a lightweight, "estate" sweeper designed for litter removal, e.g., peanut shells, paper, confetti, etc. This kind of sweeping activity is quick and easy and should be done on an "as needed" basis, but generally once a week during heavy use. (FieldTurf provides one to customers.)

Weeds and moss

Like its natural cousins, the infilled turf may still become susceptible to weeds. It is important to prevent weeds and moss from growing on FieldTurf as it can affect the playability of the surface. Although routine maintenance will prevent this from happening, weeds may occur at the interface between the synthetic grass and the perimeter curb. Should this occur, weeds should be treated with the biodegradable



weed killer such as RoundUp, which won't negatively affect the fibers or the coloring of your field. If the weed problems should arise, a 3-prong tool can be used to remove weeds and moss from the affected areas. This should be done carefully to not tear the backing and damage the fabric.

Moss can grow on the field surface if the following conditions are present:

- The field surface has not been maintained or groomed over a long period of time.
- If there is an unusual amount of shade on the field and the field has been neglected.
- If the field surface has been left covered with vinyl tarps over a long period of time.
- If there is sufficient moisture and all other conditions for growth are met.

Weed and moss can only occur if the field has been neglected.

Fill displacement

FieldTurf has a very heavy fill of sand and rubber that is unlikely to float, even in heavy rain. But routinely grooming the field will assure that the infill is uniformly distributed at all times over the entire field surface. Intensive and repetitive use of certain areas of the field such as the kicking action of the players may cause the infill material to be displaced. Particularly for soccer fields, these specific areas are: penalty shots, center spots, and corner kick areas.

Field Protection

Today's athletic facilities must be able to accommodate additional events to increase the possible revenue sources. If events or venues other than approved activities are to be held on your field, the surface must be protected at all times to prevent possible damage. Tarps are good for general purposes; however, special events may need additional protection, such as plywood to spread the loads of stages or vehicles. A call to the synthetic system's service department can get you the right information on loading and special protective equipment that is recommended.

Disinfectants

The issue of disinfecting turf is a subject unto itself. Bottom line, synthetic fields, like grass, gym floors, wrestling mats and other sports surfaces can harbor microbes that can cause infections. It is a hygiene issue. Scrapes and cuts, if they occur, must be cleaned and disinfected thoroughly (because synthetic fields are not muddy or dirty, players sometimes think cuts are "clean" and do not clean and disinfect them as aggressively as they do on natural grass fields).

Players should not share whirlpools or towels, must shower after every activity, and should wash towels and uniforms frequently (daily is recommended). (FieldTurf offers cleansers and other anti-microbial treatments.)

Troy Squires is vice president of marketing for FieldTurf Tarkett, www.fieldturf.com. ■

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