



## Ohio firm builds synthetic R&D fields

**P**ioneer Athletics in Cleveland has constructed three different turf fields solely for product testing on property adjacent to their business complex, which the company calls the "University of Pioneer." Their goal is to separate myth from fact regarding the care and maintenance of synthetic turf fields.

Thirty years ago, when synthetic turf started its climb to popularity, many universities, high schools and park & rec departments

bought into the promise of being able to host more events and lower operating costs. Many began to make the switch from natural turf fields to synthetic turf fields.

Pioneer recognized this growing trend in synthetic turf and realized that there were no paints or products designed with the synthetic turf manager in mind. "We were beginning to get a lot of questions and comments from our customers, who used to have natural turf and switched to synthetic turf, wondering what products we had available



for their new synthetic surfaces," says Pioneer's Chris Fiore. "They wanted to be able to put a different color of paint over their goal lines or paint the endzone for Homecoming, but there was nothing on the market that would enable them to do that without potential damage and costly repair to their turf."

To bridge the gap between the unknown and the possible in sports turf, Pioneer set out to develop products geared toward synthetic turf. Their research, development and education within the industry became a 25-year process.

In the early 80's, Pioneer began creating and developing Titan, a field paint exclusive to synthetic turf made with the same components found in the company's natural turf paints. Today, with infill fields gaining popularity, Pioneer introduced Titan Removable paint, which gives sports turf managers the option to apply and remove paint, logos, and stencils in three steps, without the risk of damage to the turf.

The desire to expand their body of knowledge has now led to the "University of Pioneer." With the synthetic turf industry growing, Pioneer began prospecting several different turf companies with their concept for an unaffiliated research and development training ground for products geared toward synthetic turf. Stripers, paints,



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disinfectants, and various other products would be used on the training ground to test function, usability, and longevity.

"We approached many companies who saw the same demands in the industry and who had the same vision about the future of athletic turf as we did," says Fiore. Sprinturf and Sportexe joined the venture and offered up many styles of turf.

"[We] all agreed to release the data as widely as possible to help further the industry," says Fiore. "Our goal is to provide the information turf managers need to provide the best playing surfaces possible."

"We are working hard to test different technologies and techniques so that we can separate fact from myth. The University of Pioneer is about educating the industry and their consumers," adds Pioneer's president, Doug Schattinger.

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Sprinturf and Sportexe agreed to donate several sections of synthetic turf and each section contained a different variety of turf. Several different varieties of natural turf were also included in the mix. "With both companies granting us use of their turf, an agreement was reached that all research and development from the University of Pioneer would be shared. Once this happened we were able to move forward and begin the planning of construction and installation of the fields," says Schattinger.

After a lengthy process, the Sports Construction Group of Cleveland was picked to install the several different sections and varieties of natural and synthetic turf. "The Sports Construction Group did an amazing job with construction and installation," says Schattinger. "There were some very specific requirements that we felt we needed for the field and they executed it perfectly."

When installation was completed in early November, the University of Pioneer consisted of three fully functioning mixed turf fields, with nearly a dozen varieties of natural and synthetic turf spread over three separate areas each in excess of 60 x 60 feet.

The fields, which replaced a grass knoll adjacent to Pioneer's shipping and receiving area, are a colorful assortment of turf and seems a little out of place with the other industrial companies surrounding it, but Pioneer wouldn't have it any other way. "This venture is a major step for the turf and turf paint industry; no other company has a testing ground like this and we are going to use that to our advantage," Fiore says. "We believe in the sharing of knowledge and exchanging of ideas and this next year should prove very valuable to sports turf managers across the U.S. We plan on sharing new developments each year at the STMA Convention," adds Schattinger.

For more information about the University of Pioneer, visit [www.pioneerathletics.com](http://www.pioneerathletics.com) or call 1-800-877-1500.

*This article was written by Pioneer's marketing department and edited by ST editor Eric Schroder. ■*

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