

# University of Tennessee and AstroTurf break ground on new research center

**T**HE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE and AstroTurf recently broke ground on the new Research Center for Safer Athletic Fields. The ceremony was held at the UT Institute of Agriculture's East Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center in Knoxville. Former UT football star Eric Berry was on hand along with researchers and AstroTurf representatives to celebrate the occasion.

The center, which is the first of its kind in the country, will conduct research on both natural and syn-

thetic playing surfaces, using 60 small-scale athletic research fields, as well as mechanical and human studies in order to simulate playing conditions. The overall goal of the project is to make playing fields safer for athletes in the future.

This project is the brainchild of Dr. John Sorochan, associate professor in plant science at UT, and Dr. Jim Brosnan, assistant professor in plant science. The two will head the research at the center.

"This is something I've dreamed about for a long time," said Sorochan. "We do have now, easily, the single largest sports turf research program in the world and our

efforts are dedicated to making athletic fields safer for all levels of playing surface, synthetic and natural grass, but more importantly, it's for all levels of play."

"We both got involved in sports turf research because we knew that there were things we could do to athletic fields to make them safer for athletes," Brosnan said.

Eric Berry, who attended as the ceremony's special guest, explained his enthusiasm for the new research endeavor.

"I'm very excited to get this under way," said the Kansas City Chiefs 1st-round pick. "A lot of people don't understand how much strain and how much stress turf can



*"This is our field of dreams. It's been built and everyone is coming."*

» Above: DR. JOHN SOROCHAN Below: GROUNDBREAKING LINEUP at the new Research Center for Safer Athletic Fields at the University of Tennessee.





» JIM PRETTYMAN, left, COO of AstroTurf, with Eric Berry, former Volunteer safety and #1 pick of NFL's Kansas City Chiefs.

actually have on an athlete's body.

"I think this is a very good deal," he said. "I think this research will benefit a lot of athletes, and I'm very appreciative of everything being done to help us out and just for looking at us as people.

"As athletes, we already have 11 guys trying to take our heads off every play, why have the turf after you also?"

AstroTurf, which is donating the start up and construction costs for the new center reiterated their commitment to safer athletic fields and the research necessary for them.

"AstroTurf stands for quality, research, ethics-based marketing, and excellence in products that we make and we are extremely interested in safety," said COO Jim Prettyman, who was on hand as the company's spokesperson for the event.

"This was a really great opportunity for us to take what we stand for in AstroTurf and put it into play with a world class university and I can't tell you how excited we are to be working with the University of Tennessee," he said.

"I want to give a lot of accolades to AstroTurf because they've had the vision and they are actually funding more natural grass research for athletic fields than anyone else has in history," said Sorochan. "This is our field of dreams. It's been built and everyone is coming."

Research at the outdoor facility will begin as soon as fall 2010, and the center is expected to be fully operational by 2011. ■

*Justin West is Website Editor, School of Journalism & Electronic Media, University of Tennessee in Knoxville.*

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