

# Getting your field markings right

**TIMES WERE**, the grounds crew re-lined the field as necessary. Translation? In warm weather, with sufficient rain and heavy play, someone might have to go out there every few days, if not more often, with a line marker and chalk powder. And if you were talking about a field that was used for multiple sports, frequent re-lining was a given.

The development of line paint and equipment made it possible to do the job in less time, but as grass grew and received wear from a variety of sports, re-marking the fields remained a big part of the work. And as land for fields became increasingly scarce, school fields (as well as park fields, camp fields and more) began to get increased use. By the end of the season, crews often found themselves marking mostly dirt.

The advent of synthetic fields has created ever-increasing efficiency, allowing fields to host more sports without resting,

seeding or sodding, and save time by (a) being ready for play after a rain and (b) not needing re-lining.

Or does it? As it becomes the norm for fields to host a variety of sports, it becomes necessary for them to have a variety of markings. After all, one facility may see athletes take the field for football, soccer, lacrosse, field hockey and more, each featuring its own dimensions and markings. Even within specific sports, there can be variations in size between men's and women's fields (or on the high school level, boys' and girls' fields). So how is it possible

to mark the field without it taking on the "gymnasium floor" look?

Part of the advantage of synthetic turf is the ability to have lines and markings inlaid when turf is installed. But how to balance the needs of multiple sports? Prioritize, say builders. It's as simple as: 1) deciding which sports will be played, and 2) deciding which sports will be played the most often.

For the sports played the most often, choose lines that have the greatest contrast to the turf; in other words, if soccer is the dominant sport, choose white lines for delineation. If football is the second most popular, go with yellow there. Other sports should use more muted colors, such

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>> **HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY**; photo courtesy of Medallion Athletic Products, Mooresville, NC





**Left: SANTA BARBARA CITY COLLEGE;** photo courtesy of UBU Sports, Atlanta, GA **Middle: TAOS ECO PARK;** photo courtesy of Lone Mountain Contracting, Bosque Farms, NM **Right: TECUMSEH HIGH SCHOOL TRACK FACILITY;** photo courtesy of Foresite Design, Inc., Berkley, MI

as dark red, dark blue, etc. Creating “tick marks” or “hash marks” may also work well, depending upon the venue. A field contractor can work with you to decide upon markings and colors that work for you. The ultimate goal is to allow players and officials to have a clear sense of boundaries at all times.

A fairly new development in artificial turf fields is line paint (temporary and permanent); information on such products is readily available. However, before applying anything, field managers are advised to get recommendations from the company that installed their fields.

Corner flags, cones, indicators and other equipment can also help provide visual boundaries. The choice of equipment is a personal one, and one that takes into consideration the needs of the athletes, officials and coaching personnel.

## LOGOS

Placement of logos in end zones and at mid-field is a long-standing tradition and a part of school pride. In many cases, logos and team names can be a permanent part of the surface. If a new logo is needed on a field, talk to a turf builder about the best means to accomplish this. (Do not attempt to mark turf as a do-it-yourself project—an “artwork” project that goes wrong can be unsightly and expensive to repair.)

## LINE MAINTENANCE

Even with inlaid markings, however, fields are not entirely maintenance-free. Because over time, turf infill can (and will) shift because of constant foot traffic (particularly in areas like the crease in a lacrosse field), the lines may take on a wavy appearance. This also happens when the turf surface gets slightly twisted, as it will when band practices or repetitive motion drills are held on the field.

Take a good look at the turf on a regular basis, and don’t be afraid to call your builder for a quick consult if you notice anything looking out of place. Your field is, after all, an investment, and you want to make the most of it.

If using an approved removable paint on your turf (we’re assuming you’re following the manufacturer’s directions, of course), make sure to use proper equipment for marking and removal. Many paint manufacturers recommend techniques and proprietary equipment.

## A WORD ABOUT THOSE “OTHER” MARKINGS

A lush field of natural grass may be able to soak up the occasional bottle of sports drink or soda pop without complaint, but field builders warn against bringing those items or anything else that can stain, spill or leave a residue onto a synthetic surface.

After all, the synthetic turf won’t grow, and no mower will be passing through to cut down a stained area.

Allow only water into the field enclosure, and in case of any stains or food residue, contact the field builder to get a recommendation on how to clean it off. (In some cases, the solution may be very simple, but it is always best to check before attacking a stain with something that might cause damage to the turf).

Walk the field regularly and remove debris, such as candy wrappers, food, bottles or anything else you see. This includes leaves, sticks, pine needles and cones, and more. (Remember such materials can, over time, leave sap and cause staining).

You’ve put a lot of time, resources and planning into this field. Put the same amount into deciding upon the right markings (and the right method of marking). Then, make sure the original markings are the only ones that stay there. Your field will reward you and your athletes with years of good service as a result. ■

*Mary Helen Sprecher wrote this article on behalf of the American Sports Builders Association. Available at no charge is a listing of all publications offered by the ASBA, as well as their Membership Directory. For info, 866-501-2722 or [www.sportsbuilders.org](http://www.sportsbuilders.org).*