

# Having input into renovation & construction projects

Photo courtesy Warner Larson, Inc., Boston, MA.



Above and middle: Photos courtesy Warner Larson, Inc., Boston, MA.

**W**e've all done it: sat across the conference table from someone in business and thought, "This would be a lot easier if the other person only (fill in the blank with a specific task you wish the other person would do)."

Let's face it: there's always going to be a time you want to bypass the whole learning curve. If we could only define in advance who was responsible for what tasks, it would save time and most importantly, keep problems to a minimum. As designers and builders of sports fields, we're faced with this every day. We sit down with the owners and managers of the facilities we're planning

to build and rehab. And invariably, from each side of the table come the questions. Who's responsible for this? Why wasn't this piece of information made clear? And what's the best way to correct this without costing a lot of extra money and time?

So here's our suggestion. Let's all work together to head off problems at the pass by defining now what we both need.

## INFORMATION

As the sports turf manager, you have unique access to specific information about your project before the first shovel hits the ground. Bring that information to the table right away: **Your vision, and that of the owner.** This is where you have to sit down and provide a complete written prospectus. Ultimately, this will help your design/build team understand

**Left:** Photo courtesy Medallion Athletic Products, Mooresville, N.C.

exactly what you want, and exactly how they can help create your field of dreams. So make a list: Is this a field for one sport? For multiple sports, and if so, which ones? Do you anticipate having a running track built around the perimeter? Do you anticipate the facility growing over time to include a stadium, a locker room, etc.? Who are your users: high schoolers? College students? The community? Will there be use year-round or just in certain months?

Making a prospectus is a daunting project, but you'll be glad you did it and so will your design/build team and ultimately, the owner of your project.

"Put on paper everything you want your facility to be," says Mark Brogan of Pro-Sport Construction, Inc. in Devon, Pa. "Once construction has



Photo courtesy Medallion Athletic Products, Mooresville, N.C.

started, it's a lot harder not to mention more expensive, to add or change something."

Once your prospectus is written, have everyone involved read and sign off on it: your athletic director, coaches, principals (if this is a school), park and rec director (if it's a municipal field), team owner (if it's a professional facility), etc. After that, it should come to the design and build pros. In short, everyone needs to be on board and have the same vision.

### BUDGET FOR THE PROJECT

Right here, we're talking start-to-finish for all aspects design, construction and materials. What is the bottom line for your project?

"A complete budget is the most important piece of information we can have," says Dan Wright of Sports Turf Company in Whitesburg, Ga.

**Timeline:** Does the field need to be completed in time for homecoming? In time for a dedication? Are you anticipating holding a graduation, festival or other special event on it? Tell your design/build team right now so they can factor that in.

**Budget for maintenance:** This includes whether maintenance will be done professionally or in-house, and how often. Yes, you need to know this now. It will influence what we build and how we build it. If you will be doing your own maintenance, you'll

appreciate knowing a system can work within your given time and budget constraints. After all, we know this is a place where, like it or not, owners want to save money.

"Proper maintenance will really help with things like drainage issues," says Dan Wright. But, he adds, it's where too many cut back and cut corners. "If you're a pro team or a major university, you can probably afford a full maintenance plan, but a park and rec or a local high school often has budget issues, and that's where they might cut."

**Permitting:** This is a big issue, but it's often overlooked. Is the sports turf manager responsible for securing all applicable permits? Is the designer or builder? The only right answer here is the one you decide upon in advance, since it can save a lot of unnecessary problems and delays. Same applies to finding out about local codes and which authorities have to be notified about pending construction or rehab projects.

**Surface preference:** This is not a debate natural grass vs. synthetic turf. Whichever you choose, however, know that this will affect the entire design and construction of the field. Choose a surface based on how much use, and what type of use, your field will get. Builders can provide recommendations.

"While synthetic was initially marketed based on the money it would save on water,

fertilizer, and labor, those savings do not in fact cover the additional cost of synthetic turf," says Robert J. Cohen of Sport Surfaces Distributing, Inc. in Albuquerque, NM. "The actual benefit of synthetic is that it can be played on all day, and that one field can serve multiple uses, something you could consider if you're worried about the cost of buying land for additional fields."

**Playing lines:** How many sports you want your field to accommodate? This might seem minor, but the wrong choices, or the choices that are made too late, will come back to haunt a facility, particularly one with a synthetic surface.

"The owner needs to think carefully about the sports for which they will want permanent lines installed," says Jon Renner, CTB, of Line Design, Inc. in Littleton, Colorado. "A maze of lines on a field can certainly be confusing to athletes, officials and spectators. If it's known for sure that a field will be used for soccer, football, field hockey, as well as men's and women's lacrosse — there are different sets of lines for men and women — then it's probably in the owner's best interest to have them permanently inlaid in the turf. If there is some doubt as to the usefulness of a particular line or the field's use for a particular sport, it may be best to just paint it on, and repaint the markings yearly, as long as it is needed. Removal of inlaid lines can be expensive and problematic."



## OVERSIGHT

Once design and construction has begun, the sports turf manager should work as an active liaison between the professional team and the owner. The manager should be relaying questions, getting answers and most importantly, ascertaining the project remains on budget and on time. Remember your prospectus? Keep checking it and making sure the project is conforming to what you had in mind all along.

The construction team will have a project foreman, and the sports turf manager should be on good terms with that person, and should keep open the lines of communication. We prefer the sports turf manager to be our 'point person' rather than having us need to address multiple questions to different contacts within the administration. Knowing there is one person we can turn to makes our job a lot easier. (Designers and builders know the turf manager may need to consult with an athletic director, coach, school principal or other authority before giving us a response to a specific question, but the fact is we're just grateful that we don't have to hunt for that person ourselves, and then get passed around the administration while we wait for an answer).

Oversight should include regular visits to the site, regular conversations with the design and build pros, and regular check-ups to make sure materials will come in as ordered, payments are being made on time and that work is progressing. If weather is causing delays, or if some unexpected problem with the site crops up, this information should be relayed to the sports turf manager so that he or she can help address the issue and pass any information along to the appropriate group(s).

**Punch list approval:** When the project is completed, the sports turf manager, as the point person, will probably be the one who signs off on it. This is another place where your prospectus will come into play. Use it to create a checklist of any problems or outstanding work, and communicate with the project foreman. Check off items as they're addressed.

The sports turf manager may not be signing the final check, but he or she should be responsible for making sure each aspect of the finished project has been com-

pleted to the satisfaction of the client. And ultimately, that's what the design and build professionals want too. ■

*Mary Helen Sprecher wrote this article on behalf of the American Sports Builders Association, which helps designers, builders, owners, operators and users understand quality sports facility construction. The ASBA sponsors in-*

*formative meetings and publishes newsletters, books and technical construction guidelines for athletic facilities including sports fields. It also offers voluntary certification programs in sports facility construction and maintenance. Available at no charge is a listing of all publications offered by the Association, as well as the ASBA's Membership Directory. Info: 866-501-ASBA (2722) or [www.sportsbuilders.org](http://www.sportsbuilders.org)*

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