

# Fencing and netting on sports turf 101



Photo courtesy of Cameron McCarthy, Eugene, Oregon



Courtesy of Huntress Associates, Inc., Andover, Massachusetts



Courtesy of Stantec Sport, Boston, MA

Courtesy of Beals Alliance, Folsom, California

**TURF COLOR?** That's a subject everyone loves to talk about. Fencing and netting? Not so much. But when it comes to playing area delineation, equipment requirements and just good old-fashioned safety, it's fencing and netting that actually come into play. Let's spend some time, then, considering the options field managers are faced with.

## ON THE FENCE

If you're making decisions about the fence for the periphery of your field, you'll have several considerations. Chain link has long been the obvious choice. It's fairly economical, effective at defining boundaries, and depending upon the height, can limit or prohibit unauthorized access and use of your field after hours. Other more decorative options may exist, including vinyl or wood, but chain link remains the standard in athletic fields.

In athletic installations, chain link is seen in both galvanized and vinyl-clad form. Both

are acceptable. Vinyl cladding is more expensive, but may be ordered to match school or institutional colors, and can help keep a fence looking newer longer. It also enhances the durability of the fence fabric, particularly in corrosive environments, such as areas where air pollution is a problem, or in seaside areas, where exposure to salt water is a possibility. Top rails are usually installed on all chain link fences for stability and appearance. Mid rails are often used as well. Bottom rails keep fence fabric from bulging. In some cases, the less expensive option of a tension wire is used

along the bottom of a fence instead of a rail; however, a player who falls and slides into or partially under the fence risks more danger from this arrangement.

Galvanized fencing, if chosen, should be kept free of barbs or other projections which sometimes occur in the galvanizing process. (Such projections often referred to as 'burrs,' can cause injury to an athlete or spectator). All fencing should have selvages or edges, both top and bottom, bent double (the industry term is 'knuckled') to prevent injuries and to minimize the possibility of leaves, litter, grass clippings or other

debris from collecting or becoming snagged there.

The height of your fence will depend, first, upon the use of the field it encloses. According to the Major League Baseball website, the average height of outfield fencing is 8 feet; however, 4- to 6-foot fencing is often used on recreational fields for both baseball and softball. For higher levels of play, the top edge of the fence may be padded with 3 inches of foam (or capped with a commercially made product) to help ensure safety of players who want to attempt challenging plays.

The height of fencing that is meant to keep balls in play must be carefully considered, say the experts.

"We don't know any entity that directs the fencing and netting heights for non-professional sports," notes Derek McKee of Verde Design in Santa Clara, CA. "We have gone to games to record foul balls and heights to give us a record for design."

Also used in softball and

baseball is a backstop (the wing like fence structure behind home plate that protects spectators and others from flying balls and tossed bats). It too can be made of chain link fencing, although some are constructed of nets and cables, depending upon the use of the field and the level of play involved.

Many sports, particularly those for equipment-heavy sports, use chain link equipment cages so that players can keep their gear secure, and in one location while playing. These cages may be completely fenced in chain link, or may be open on top, or the top may be covered by sports netting (more on this material in a minute).

Fields for sports such as soccer, field hockey and lacrosse, as well as rugby and football also are generally delineated by fencing, and again, it is usually chain link. This fencing may be 4 to 6 feet in height, although occasionally, higher fences are used for security purposes. Sports fields in general also have a setback, or safety zone, around them, to keep spectators and players clear of one another. This area too must be taken into consideration when making plans to delineate space between fields. Before installing fencing, check to make sure setbacks are correct, and that all current regulations are being followed. Remember that in some sports, such as soccer, field dimensions will vary, depending on whether athletes are high school, college or professional players.

In chain link fencing, gates should be wide enough to comply with all regulations concerning handicap accessibility. In addition, field maintenance equipment and if necessary, emergency vehicles and personnel must be able to access the field.

## NET RESULT

Netting also is used to great effect in athletic fields. It is light and airy, and provides excellent visibility for players and spectators. Netting can be used to contain balls and keep them in play, as well as to keep spectators from injury in the case of loose equipment or balls.

On soccer, field hockey and lacrosse fields, netting is often set at a height of 20 feet (although heights up to 40 feet may be used). Netting may be installed only behind goals or at the ends of fields, or it may encircle the field. (It may be more commonly used in some sports than others; for example, football fields often use netting only behind goals, and may raise it only during field goal efforts). In addition, netting may be used when athletes in the same area might interfere with one another; for example, in a case where a running track encircles an athletic field, a net might be set up to keep soccer players from interfering with track athletes while both are practicing.

Some netting is set in posts on the surface of the field and can be taken down as needed, while in other installations, extension poles may be attached to an assembly on the top of the existing chain link fence posts. (This results in less expense for netting, plus a sturdy base on the field). Netting is also used in track and field installations, particularly in throwing events, such as shot put and discus.

In athletic uses, netting should have openings no larger than 1-1/2 inch square. (The exception to this is netting that surrounds a driving range, or will be used as impact netting for

golfers; this requires a much smaller mesh). Driving ranges and golf courses also may have specific requirements pertaining to height. Some may even require a netted roof, depending upon local codes, insurance concerns and more.

Athletic netting is usually black, but may be purchased in other colors, such as white or green. It can be procured from a variety of sports-specific sources; ascertain that you are getting the correct mesh size for the sport(s) your field hosts. (Fun fact: Netting is available for multiple other sports as well, including tennis and archery, so be sure to have a full list).

Netting that is used in athletic installations of any type should be tough, UV-resistant, weather-resistant and easily repaired.

As with all other fencing, netting that encircles a field must be able to be easily removed in order to allow access to emergency vehicles, maintenance equipment and all other legitimate uses. It may also become necessary to remove netting from time to time in the event of high winds or other extreme conditions, as well as after the playing season has ended.

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). ■

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