

# Q&A



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## Questions?

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# What makes a field good?

*Our field looks a lot like turf [meaning synthetic turf in this context], but I know it is not. But it looks like it. Isn't that good? You are a turf doctor, so what makes our field good? How come our field looks different than others when I watch it on TV?—Security Officer #1, EverBank Field, Jacksonville, FL*

For those of you that do not know, EverBank Field is the home stadium facility of the Jacksonville Jaguars of the NFL and also hosts the annual Florida-Georgia game and the Gator Bowl. Like many other large stadiums it has also hosted the occasional motocross, monster truck event, and music concert. It is a great stadium with a talented grounds crew headed by my good friend, Mark Clay. And as the security guard alluded to in his questions, the field looks about as close to perfect as you can get with natural grass.

Getting back to the question, let me provide more background information. At last month's North Florida STMA meeting, I was an invited speaker. Everyone that goes into EverBank Field has to check in with security. On that day one of the two security officers at the check-in station noticed that my name badge had "Dr." on it and he asked if I was a "Turf Doctor." I said I was of sorts. He said he had some questions and then he proceeded to ask, starting with the ones I indicated at the start of this article. His colleague (I'll call him Security Officer #2) also had some thoughts on fields so the three of us had a lively discussion.

First, I tried to explain to these guys that turf could be natural turfgrass not just synthetic turf. Security Officer #1 could not accept that fact, insisting that turf was artificial and grass was [living] grass. I really botched my explanation when I introduced the word "turf-

grass." Security officer #2 tried to help me out but we did not get very far. My day as an educator was not beginning going so well—only 50% acceptance. After a few minutes I had to resort to using turf versus grass terminology, figuring that they could continue the vocabulary argument later.

Second, I needed to address the concept of what makes a field good? Obviously these guys were similar to most sports fans in that they actually notice what the fields on TV look like each week. Natural grass fields used by the NFL, particularly early in the season, are so perfectly uniform in color and

I told the security guys how much the field crew "pokes small holes" in the grass to make it softer and that they constantly monitor the watering, fertilization, and mowing. Everything is measured and applied with precision. These tasks and other are all carefully orchestrated around use so that no management practice goes undone and no resource is wasted. This attention to detail combined with professional grade equipment and products allows the field crew to achieve perfection far beyond what the average person can do with their home lawn. I stressed that the ground crew is professionals, not a

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density with their crisp lines and logos that they may not look natural to some onlookers. They immaculate fields are often nothing like the fields the fans remember playing on when they were a kid—colored a splotchy yellowish-green with uneven grass heights, worn areas, and outlined with crooked lines produced from haphazard application of some ill-chosen substances like lime, diesel fuel, or non-selective herbicide.

Of course uniformity alone does not make a field good. From a use perspective, it has to have good footing for the players and enough cushion that when they fall on the surface that it provides some protection from injuries. This is why the NFL has started a new program to routinely evaluate fields for hardness and try to get them all under a specific "hardness value."

bunch of amateurs still trying to master their trade.

I explained to them that some fields on TV look different because they may use different grasses or they are likely maintaining their field under different weather conditions. Also, the other stadium fields may be used differently than EverBank Field. There could be a large number of potential explanations. And in the end, it does not mean one field is necessarily better than another. They may look different but play similarly. These last two statements opened the door for a string of new questions. But by now the line was starting to form behind me with meeting attendees wanting to check in, so I needed to go. So, we'll have to visit again another time. ■