

Saints to Use Natural Grass in Superdome

The safety issue has been a prominent part of the debate pitting natural-grass surfaces against artificial turf. A recent NFL Players Association survey found that 86-percent of players polled prefer natural turf. Many cited safety concerns as a major reason for their responses.

For NFL teams that play in permanently covered domed stadiums, artificial surfaces have provided the only option. This will change August 28, when the New Orleans Saints play a pre-season game against the Green Bay Packers in the Louisiana Superdome on natural grass.

Using a new system called STN2000 developed by Southern Turf Nurseries, specially designed equipment will install eight-foot wide big-roll sod for the event. The five- to six-month old natural-grass rug will sit directly over the Superdome's existing cement floor.

Forty trucks will begin delivering the grass Tuesday, August 24, and the field should be completely installed early Wednesday morning. Designed primarily for single-event use, the grass can survive in the covered environment for up to 11 days. Both the installation and removal processes can be completed in 10 to 14 hours.

The STN2000 system provides a thick stand of grass that's fully transportable, and it has been trial tested for strength and durability by the NFL. "This opportunity is exciting for the Saints, but even more exciting for the NFL, because it provides an avenue to further explore the reality of bringing grass indoors to all other stadiums," says Bill Kuharich, president, general manager, and chief operating officer of the Saints. "Our players are definitely looking forward to this particular game."

Kuharich explains, "We put the STN2000 through a trial run in our parking lot with a few of our players; and the grass, at that time, was only 70-days old, and it was very durable." Representatives from the NFL and the NFL Players Association joined NFL turf experts to witness the December trial.

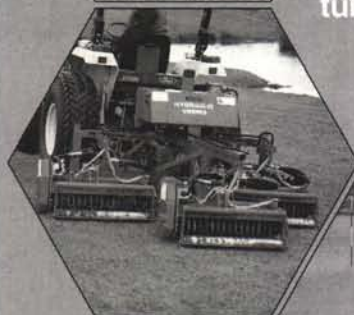
"This is a new day for us," says Southern Turf Nurseries President Eddie Woerner. "We have not only taken our natural grass and created a rug, but have also designed the equipment for installation and removal in record time. We have built a natural-grass system that provides an excellent alternative as a tough playing surface."

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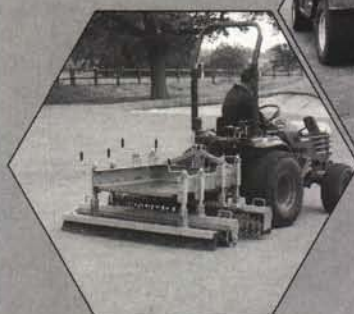
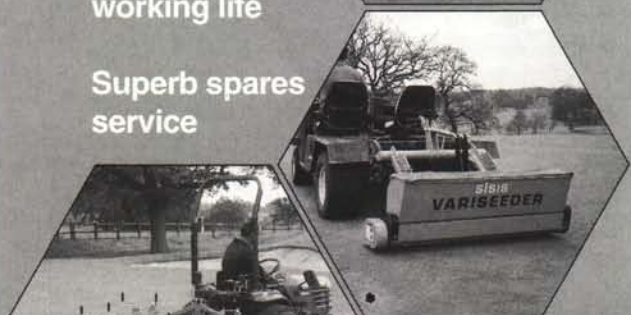
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