

from the sidelines

Synthetic turf is THE issue

Dear Editor:

My employer, a small private school in Indianapolis, will embark on construction of two new artificial fields this spring to relieve traffic associated with K-12 athletic and physical education needs. Left will be natural grass softball and baseball fields that double as varsity and practice soccer fields in the fall. Between these fields and the surrounds, there is still ample natural turf for my assistant and I to manage. Will artificial turf management practices be outlined in articles appearing in SPORTSTURF similar to the Field Maintenance Sidebars of the Fields of the Year? There are still a lot of us who will be managing both simultaneously.

Garry Howard, Athletic Facilities Manager
Park Tudor School, Indianapolis, IN

Thanks for the column lead, Garry. I don't know if you attended the Sports Turf Managers Association event in Phoenix this January, but the topic your question addresses was echoing not only in STMA programs but in many of the conversations among attendees.

How to effectively maintain the new fields that so many now are building, from private schools in the heartland to professional fields on both coasts, has become of primary importance. Savvy turf managers have stopped asking, "Why?" and started asking, "How?"

Mark Nicholls, president of Sportex, a Canadian company that manufactures the Momentum system, faced a respectful but questioning audience during his General Session presentation in Arizona. One thing he said that was repeated more than once during the meeting: "There are major differences in the systems today; get involved now, don't let others drive the process."

Nicholls also stressed "auditing for need" when thinking about synthetic systems. What specific sports/other activities will be held on the field? What will your lining needs be? How do you convert between uses?

Another key area, as always, is money. How will you finance? Capital budget or operating budget? Is there a lease option? Early planning is necessary to address budget concerns, Nicholls said.

And of course there's something that is constant in many business decisions: selecting good partners. Nicholls stressed making personal site visits, and finding designers and installation crews with "proven track records."

So Garry, the answer is "yes," this magazine is pursuing stories to bring you this information*. For example, next month's issue will include a synthetic turf buyer's guide and comments from the Synthetic Turf Council, which has created a certification program to "identify companies who have voluntarily committed themselves to a higher standard."

*SPORTSTURF wants to hear from readers who are currently maintaining a synthetic surface field and want to share their maintenance routine or some tips on cleaning, extending fiber life, etc.

Please email me at eschroder@aip.com and we'll share what you've learned with your peers.



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