

Because of the many advantages of synthetic turf products, the marketplace is virtually exploding. This growth will enhance research and development. It has and will encourage the entry of new competitors. There are variations in the size, experience and financial stability of companies offering turf products. Competition is fierce and, as in any new field, some problems are inevitable.

For example, what is an appropriate warranty? There simply isn't enough experience with this product to say. Obviously, the useful life of a synthetic turf field will depend on the quality of the products used and the skill of the installer. However, with many new companies entering the field, it also is obvious that the owner should research and question the manufacturer/installer's stability. Any warranty is only as good as the corporate and financial strength of the company that offers it.

Make specific choices

Make specific choices regarding additional facilities, amenities, and accessories to be included in your field project.

A fine field begins with a well-built base and a quality surface, but it doesn't end there. Will the construction project include benches, bleachers, fencing, lighting, scoreboards, a new track or track repair and reconstruction, construction or relocation of field events? Most owners want a complete project and, often, it is more economical to construct it all at the same time than piecemeal.

You also should budget funds for equipment such as goals and field markers, as well as for utility vehicles and apparatus for routine maintenance of the field.

Hire a qualified contractor

Choosing the right contractor can determine the ultimate success of your facility. A knowledgeable and experienced contractor can help you to make the right

A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT WILL DEPEND ON:

1. Thorough planning
2. Proper site analysis
3. Professional design and engineering
4. A quality turf product
5. Expert construction including proper drainage, a stable base and a quality surface
6. Proper integration with the surrounding track and/or other site structures
7. Accurate marking

decisions resulting in a quality project. Turf field construction is a highly specialized field within the construction industry. It is vital that the contractor you choose be familiar with the current marketplace, as well as with the type of surface you intend to install.

How do you find a qualified contractor? One way is to contact the ASBA. As the trade association for sports builders, the ASBA can provide a Directory of its members. In addition, the ASBA conducts a certified builder program for track builders, many of whom also build turf fields. The Association also conducts an inquiry program, requesting information on your behalf from contractors and suppliers who have the answers to your questions. (See our online list of Certified Track Builders and our online inquiry form on our website at www.ustctba.org.)

Another way to locate such specialists is by contacting municipal facilities and schools that have recently completed projects. Ask whether or not they would recommend their contractor and, further, ask some specific questions. Was the job completed on time? Did it meet the owner's expectations? Were there any hidden costs? Was the contractor able to solve any problems that arose during construction? If there have been any post-construction problems, was the builder responsive in

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taking care of them? How does the field look? How does it perform? Remember, the experience, skill and reliability of the prospective builder all are important.

Once you have the names of a few builder prospects, consider the following:

* How many years has the company been in business? If it is a relatively new

company, what is the work experience of its principals? How many fields have they built? Were they responsible for the complete project, just for surfacing, just for site work? Look for individuals or for a company with specific knowledge and experience in turf field construction.

* Does the company have experience in the type of project you contemplate? Look for a company with experience in projects similar in size and scope to yours.

* Ask for references and for a complete list of recent projects. If a significant project is omitted from the list of references, there may be a reason for that omission. Call references and ask questions. Determine as much information as you can about a prospective contractor's knowledge, experience, workmanship, ability to meet schedules, financial responsibility, and accountability. If possible, visit completed projects and talk to owners.

* Get references from design professionals, subcontractors, bankers and bonding companies.

* Ask about a contractor's insurance; have there been any major accidents or claims against the builder? Consider using ASBA's Contractor Qualification Form to secure necessary information.

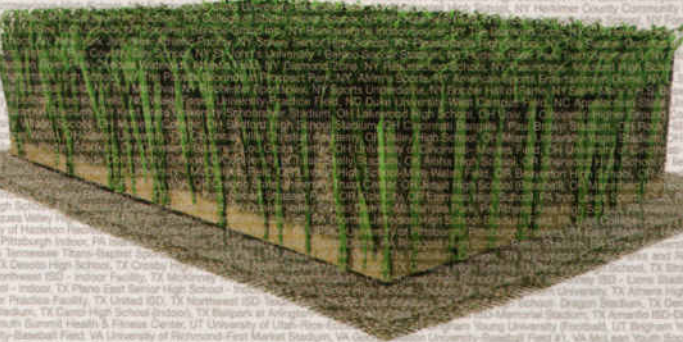
* Ask about awards and recognition. Has the contractor won any awards for its work? Have the contractor or any of its employees been certified or accredited by any trade organization?

* Check on lawsuits. If the contractor has been or is currently involved in litigation, find out the details. Check with your local Better Business Bureau, or with any local licensing agency, for consumer complaints.

* Ask to meet the individuals who will be involved with your project, particularly the job superintendent. Does the contractor/superintendent seem knowledgeable about measurements, orientation, materials, construction, and marking of turf fields? Does he understand grading, drainage, site preparation and base materials? Is he familiar with different turf surfaces? Can he make recommendations regarding specific surfaces for your needs? Is he a Certified Track Builder (CTB) or a member of the ASBA? What is his current workload; can he realistically handle your project within a reasonable time frame?

* Consider communication. You want a contractor who listens to you and responds to your needs. You want someone with whom you feel comfortable, someone with whom you can establish rapport. You want a contractor who will build the facility you want, not one who will build his standard field and move on. You

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6,551,639; 6,689,447; 6,723,412

want a contractor in whom you have confidence. Don't underestimate the value of a good working relationship.

* Ask for proposals in writing and compare them carefully. Ensure that the bids, including products to be used and methods of construction, are equivalent to your specifications. What is included and what is not included in the contract price? Who is responsible for such items as permits, site preparation, identification and relocation of utilities, taxes, insurance, removal and replacement of trees and shrubbery? Such items, while essential to the project, may or may not be included in the bid; whether or not they are included can significantly affect the contract price and the overall project cost. Even if construction materials and methods are identical and items included in the contract are consistent, look beyond price when comparing proposals. Compare proposed construction schedules, progress payments, and guarantees and warranties.

* Be sure that you understand what is included in any guarantee or warranty, e.g., materials, workmanship or both, and for how long. Is the warranty or guarantee backed by a bonding company, or if not, does the contractor have the financial ability and the reputation for backing up his work? Remember that a warranty is not a substitute for a quality installation by a reputable builder.

* Rank the proposals and then attempt to negotiate a contract with your first choice builder. If the bid of your preferred contractor seems high, question the bidder to determine why. Remember that price is not the only consideration. A project which is initially more expensive but which provides long-term satisfaction and wears well is a good value.

* Once you have chosen a contractor, confirm your agreement in writing. The contract documents should be as specific as possible and should include, where appropriate, a construction contract, conditions of the contract, drawings and specifications defining the scope of work including labor, materials, equipment and transportation to construct the project.

* Consider appropriate bonding. You may require a bid bond, a performance bond and/or a payment bond. Also, you should require a certificate of insurance as proof that your chosen contractor has adequate insurance coverage.

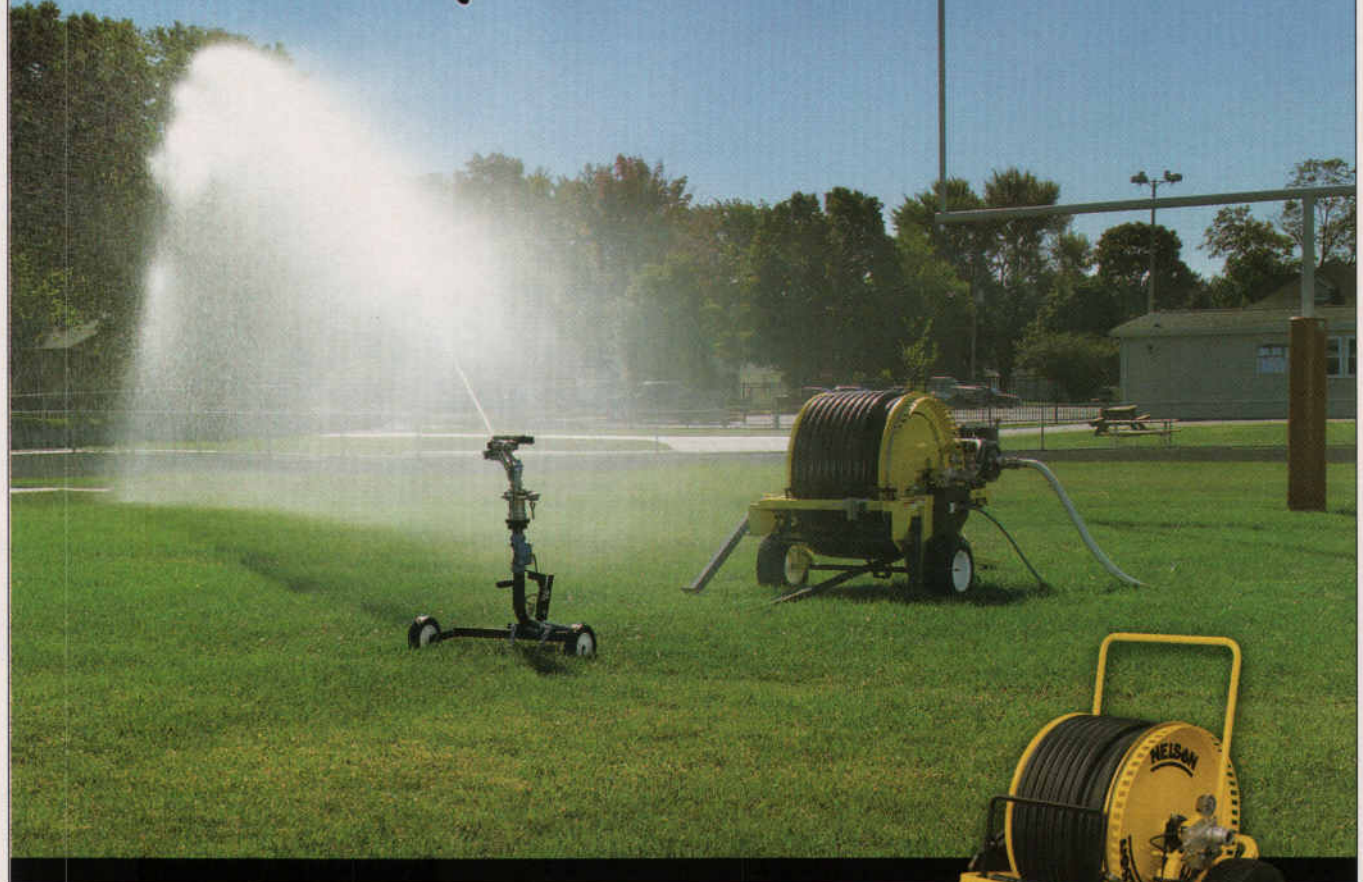
If you, the buyer, are to make the right decisions regarding a field project, becoming a knowledgeable consumer is the first step. Asking questions is not only smart, it is essential. The investment of time and energy now can yield a huge return in the

future, in terms of a quality facility, and in the hours of enjoyment that will be derived from it. **ST**

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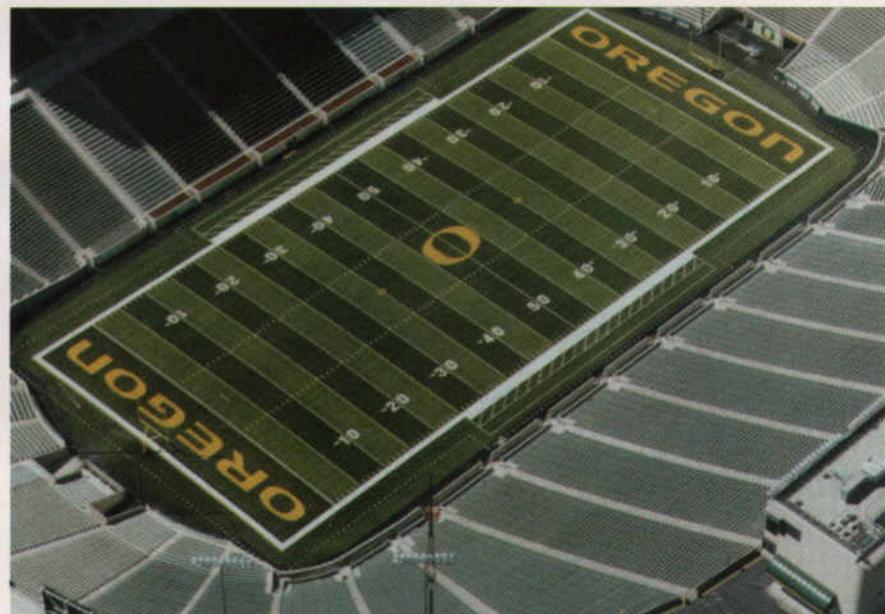
Synthetic turf systems: Pride and practicality

BY **RON VANGELDEREN**

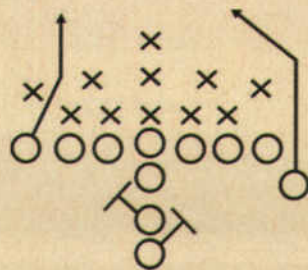
Today all turf surfaces can be state of the art and cost effective. There is no shortage of systems, products, or services. The challenge lies in the process of matching the needs of the customer with the proper system and its provider.

Synthetic turf system providers are able to meet those challenges with a myriad of products that fulfill the specifics of most every end use. Synthetic products/systems now available are significantly better because product development and innovation has resulted in a new generation of systems that are softer, more naturalistic and player friendly. All of the performance characteristics have been addressed such as traction, rotational and slip resistance, impact absorption, surface abrasiveness, and surface stability. Ball bounce and ball roll meet all the sport specific requirements and, of course, appearance and appearance retention is second to none.

Materials used in synthetic systems today are environmentally responsible both in application and use as well as disposal and sustainability. Maintenance tech-



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niques require no regular chemical treatment that makes ground water pollution and human point of contact exposure a non-issue.

In addition to the product evolution are the unique advantages of synthetic applications in terms of water conservation and the reduction of intense maintenance while having an "always ready" playing field.

Life cycle costing and reduced replacement costs have been enhanced while realistic longevity is providing tremendous budget saving opportunities. Of course, great care must be exercised in the process of selecting these systems with the knowledge that the lowest price offered may not always be the most economical or the best performing in the long run. Yet, the savings of synthetics are a given.

It is the process of selection and use of synthetic systems that is critical. In addition to the recommended use of independent professionals, there are now reliable tools, unbiased standards and non-proprietary guidelines available. When used in the selection process, the customer will know what questions to ask and need not be left holding the bag.

Raison d'être

The Synthetic Turf Council (STC) was formed to provide reliable selection and use guidelines. The industry recognized the need for an unbiased body that could help the industry rally around good practices in serving the needs of the customer and ultimate user. Now for the first time the industry has a platform comprised of the design community, builders, manufacturers, suppliers, and service entities that are striving to avoid duplication of effort, prevent misunderstandings and attain a better more efficient approach. The STC has become the source for all parties to synthetic turf process and represents more than 80% of the synthetic industries' volume. This is only the beginning. Working groups within the STC are focusing on developing programs that will achieve a better understanding of objective end user selection needs.

A code of ethics adopted by the STC membership and our "Guidelines to the Essential Elements of Synthetic Turf Systems" (available free of charge by logging on to www.syntheticurf.org) have become the basis of a certification program that identify firms who voluntarily adhere to those standards and good industry practices. It is acknowledged that doing what is right for the customer is good for business. The Council slogan says it all: "A Promise to Deliver the Promise," which is supported by a voluntary company-by-company STC Certification Program that backs that promise.

The bottom line is that synthetic systems offer outstanding and highly desirable attributes that make us all proud whether we look at televised activities or in our own neighborhoods knowing that we have made the right decision. **ST**

Ron VanGelderens is executive director of the Synthetic Turf Council, office@syntheticurf.org

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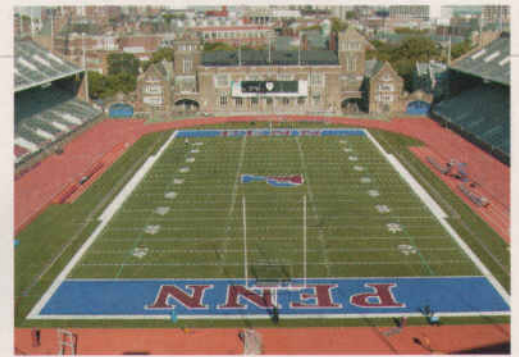
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Sprinturf's Ultrablade fiber was introduced just over 18 months ago, although extensive testing of the fiber had been conducted for several years before that. Ultrablade, a unique monofilament-like fiber, is both remarkably soft and pliable, yet amazingly durable, providing a playing surface that holds its integrity longer than any other synthetic turf fiber developed, says the company.

To demonstrate to potential customers just how durable Ultrablade is, Sprinturf simulates years of use by taking a high-powered drill with a wire brush to the fiber, and does the same with a leading competitor. After just 15 seconds of brushing, the competitor's fiber shows profound deterioration and shredding, while even after a full minute of brushing, the Ultrablade fiber emerges unscathed.

To see this demonstration, go to www.ultrabladedrilltest.com.

Purchasing a synthetic turf system can be a very intimidating but it doesn't have to be. Sprinturf advises prospective customers do their homework like they would if they were buying a car or a house. Ask lots of questions and most importantly, check the answers you get. Sprinturf is confident that the closer an owner scrutinizes their purchase, the more confident and excited they will be with a Sprinturf system.

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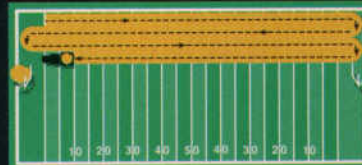


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Blue Valley SD overcomes winterkill to earn FOY

BY JODY GILL

The Switzer District Athletic Complex (SWIDAC) in Overland Park, KS has earned the 2004 Football Field of the Year honors in the High School/Parks category.

The Blue Valley School District built SWIDAC in 1993. The concrete and brick football stadium is a full-service venue with concessions and restrooms located on home and visitor mezzanines. Total football seating capacity is 5,500. The double-sided press box rises above and behind the concrete on grade bleachers with ample room for coaching staff, press, and stadi-

um management staff. The same press box also serves the sand-based Bermudagrass, soccer-specific pitch located just west of the football venue with an additional 2,500 seats. Competition baseball and softball fields are located on the east side of the visitor's bleachers.

The modern facility features multi-channel sideline communications system, concert quality sound system with wireless microphones for officials, two fully equipped locker rooms, officials' locker rooms and an 8-lane latex track with ample space for all field and jumping events. Four 95-foot concrete poles with a total of 92-1500 watt metal halide lamps illuminate the track and field for nighttime events.

The centerpiece of the facility is the competition football field. This is the home field for the Blue Valley Northwest Huskies and the Blue Valley North Mustangs. From 1993 through spring of 1997, I-25 rotors broken into 5-5 head zones irrigated the fescue field. The poorly designed irrigation system had been plagued by poor pressure due to limited water supply. In June 1997, improvements were made; the 5 head zones were broken into 2 and 3 head zones, resulting in much lower flow rates and increased dynamic pressure. Also rotors and valves were replaced as needed, and additional perimeter zones were installed to improve overall coverage.

After irrigation improvements were completed the turf was converted to Bermudagrass. In July 1997, our crews installed Quickstand Bermudagrass sod that we harvested from our 10-acre Bermuda turf farm. The renovated field was ready for play in late-August 1997. In June of 2003, we gave the field a drainage enhancement by removing the turf once more to allow us to laser grade the surface followed by re-sprigging. Again the field was ready for play in late August. The rootzone of the playing field is a clay-loam native soil. The field has no subsurface drainage so the 1.8% crown is key to keeping the field playable in wet weather by moving excess water rapidly to sideline storm water inlets.

From late February through May, the football facility is used only for track and field events. Practices occur every day and there are 6-7 track meets during the spring. During June and July, the facility is available for rent by the general public and has been used by many outside groups for events such as Relay for Life, semi-pro football games, track meets, Special Olympics, concerts, etc. August through November is reserved for high school football and band competitions. Since the facility is a home for two schools, sometimes there will be games on Thursday and Friday nights. Occasionally, we will host junior high school games on Wednesday afternoons. The high school bands practice on the field Wednesday and Thursday nights and the football team will practice on the field the day before their home game. We also host several marching band festivals, which are becoming very popular.

Staff and maintenance

Our Grounds Services staff is outstanding. John Peterman, Grounds Supervisor, is in charge of the Grounds Technician

