

Sports Turf Manager

FOR BETTER, SAFER SPORTS TURF. WINTER 2011. VOL. 24. NO. 4.

A University of Guelph Turfgrass Story

Article & Photos By Bill Clausen, Facility Manager, Athletics Department, University of Guelph

The University of Guelph expanded its artificial turf inventory three-fold this year adding two new lit soccer pitches and a half-sized field to its inventory. The University also installed state of the art Polytan Liga 265 Turf on the rugby pitch in 2010. The new fields were constructed on the site of the multipurpose practice fields located on the east side of campus near The Arboretum. The facility now features two full-sized lit artificial soccer fields, a half-sized artificial practice field and a full-sized natural grass rugby/football field. The west soccer pitches will have seating for roughly 450 spectators and the east for approximately 120.



Laying sod rolls on the new rugby field, November 2011.

Looking back, the main problem with the University of Guelph's sports fields was over-use causing such significant wear and tear that no amount of maintenance could keep them safe for play after a certain number of hours of use. University sports field use is between August 15 and November 30 each year. University of Guelph fields averaged between 45 and 60 hours of use each week during this time period. It was virtually impossible for the Grounds De-

partment to maintain turf during that time period. All that could be done was keep the fields closed from April to August and work diligently to ensure they were in as good condition as possible for the start of the fall playing season.

The secondary issue was the University's inability to host external clients on its sports fields. The Department of Athletics would receive numerous requests from local, provincial and occasionally, national sports organizations, for fields throughout

the year and the department could accommodate none of them.

Taking a step back even further, in 1971, the sports field inventory consisted of Alumni Stadium (lights), a rugby pitch (lights), soccer pitch (lights), field hockey pitch (lights), main softball diamond (lights), South Diamond, and two football-sized multipurpose fields. Student population was under 10,000 students. Varsity athletic programs consisted of men's football... >> cont. inside on page 16



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Rob Anthony, former NFL head groundskeeper, provides an in-depth perspective on the use of water to better maintain infill synthetic turf sports fields. The old myth that these fields are relatively maintenance-free no longer applies.

8 OTS 2012. Grow your knowledge by attending the province's top educational and networking annual event. We have outlined all the sports turf specific sessions on pages 8 & 11.

18 COST & SELECTION of natural turf fields. Determine your field type and then assemble the right team.



Main photo: November 10, 2011, the two new artificial turf fields with the grass rugby field in the background. Inset: Same view in mid-May 2011.

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Continued from cover... soccer, rugby and women's field hockey. Each program had their own practice/game field. Intramural use was extensive but focused on Monday to Thursday evenings after varsity practices.

Between 1971 and 2009, actual field inventory grew by only four slow-pitch diamonds and two small multipurpose spaces suitable for ultimate Frisbee. Meanwhile, student population had grown to 22,000 students. Varsity programs now include men's football, soccer, rugby, lacrosse, women's field hockey, rugby, soccer, lacrosse and softball. We more than doubled our student population and the number of varsity teams using our fields while adding minimally to the inventory. Field use was consistently from 4:30 pm to dark on the unlit fields, 4:30 pm until midnight on the lit fields Monday through Thursday, 2:30 pm until 9:30 pm on lit fields Friday, 10:00 am until 5:00 pm Saturdays and noon to midnight on Sundays.

By the first of October each year, the lit fields were definitely showing significant wear; by Thanksgiving they were mud bowls if it was a wet fall, dust bowls if dry. The unlit fields began to show significant wear after Thanksgiving and some years much earlier if we had excessive hours of use during the spring and summer.

In 2005, the Department of Athletics contracted the Consulting Services Division of the Guelph Turfgrass Institute to review our playing fields and provide a report and recommendations for improving field conditions. Among their recommendations was the establishment of one artificial turf field on the existing soccer pitch.

In 2007, the Athletic Facilities Master Plan was written. This plan suggested the need for four artificial turf fields to provide safe playing conditions year round for the department's ever expanding programs and requests from external users. In 2008, the students voted in a referendum to support a new Athletic Centre and new field

complex on the east side of campus with an additional student building fee for the next 30 years.

In May 2010, construction began on a new artificial surface on the rugby pitch suitable for soccer, football, field hockey, lacrosse and rugby. The field was completed in time for fall sports to begin their training camps on August 15, 2010. The Department of Athletics hosted Ontario University Association league, rugby, soccer, lacrosse and field hockey games throughout the fall culminating in hosting the Canadian Intercollegiate Women's Field Hockey Championships in November. Intramural programs used every hour available for touch football and soccer.

The Guelph Youth Soccer Association took to the artificial field in April 2011 when the natural grass fields were not open and the feedback was outstanding.

Venture Construction acted as the lead in this design-build project with Centaur

Products supplying the Polytan artificial turf. The project was completed on time and within its \$1.8 million dollar budget.

In May 2011, construction on Phase One of the new Gryphon Soccer Complex began with five weeks of rain. Stantec was the lead on this design-bid-build project and they provided an exceptional design that is practical and aesthetically pleasing. Wilco Landscaping acted as the General Contractor with Fairway Electric, AWS and Centaur Products as the major sub-contractors.

The additional artificial fields have allowed the Grounds Department to focus on the remaining natural grass fields and this year, Alumni Stadium was in the best condition it has been in since 1992.

The two lit soccer pitches were both completed in time for fall training camps to begin by August 15. The half-sized practice field was completed in late September. The natural grass rugby pitch was sodded the first week of November and will be ready for play next August.

Despite horrible weather conditions at the start of the project and during October, the project has been completed on time and within the Phase One budget.

Since the Gryphon Soccer Complex opened in mid-August, intercollegiate soccer, lacrosse and rugby training camps, practices and regular season games have been held. Intramural soccer, touch football and ultimate Frisbee fill almost every remaining hour. The 2011 OUA Women's Field Lacrosse Championships took place there in October.

The additional artificial fields have allowed the Grounds Department to focus on the remaining natural grass fields and Alumni Stadium was in the best condition it has been in since 1992. Intramural sports now have the opportunity to play on superior turf from the beginning to the end of the season. The entire process from planning to implementation has been a positive, successful one for all involved – especially the users.



Photo Captions. **Top:** The west field prepared for the installation of the “granular o” drainage material. **Middle:** Centaur Product’s installation crew laying the first two rows of Polytan Turf on the east field. **Above:** Compact Sod’s staff applying the finishing touches to the rugby field. **Adjacent Aerial:** The two full-sized artificial turf fields and the half-sized practice field.