

## CONSTRUCTING AN ATHLETIC FIELD

Sean Connell\*

As an athletic field construction contractor, I am frequently asked by sports turf managers and owners, "How much will a renovation cost?" Unfortunately, this is not always an easy question to answer. The amount a customer will spend on a renovation can vary widely. From my experience, the greatest differences in price usually are dependent upon several key factors: earthmoving, drainage, sod versus seed and irrigation.

Typically, a customer will ask for an estimate based on one item such as laser grading. Other key components such as grassing, irrigation, fencing, and earthmoving never get addressed. To make an accurate estimate, quantify all areas that need to be addressed before construction starts. Information that is organized makes accurate and competitive estimates for the customer and straight-forward directions for the contractor. Limited information does not complete projects; nor does it allow projects to achieve full potential.

So how does the sports turf manager or owner decide how much they need? The easiest way to do this is to obtain the services of a design engineer local to your area. The engineer will survey the area and have a topography map made of your potential site or existing field. From there, they use a program such as Land Cad (or an equivalent program) to design your field. The program can be used to show how much area will be disturbed, how much soil will need to be cut and filled, and how much grading and drainage will be required. From this design, all

other components including sod, irrigation design, fencing etc. can be incorporated into the design.

Once a basic plan is determined, agronomic decisions usually come into play. Frequently, the design engineer has little or no experience in the athletic field industry. Therefore, it is crucial that the turf manager participate in this part of the design process. After some decision making and some estimating from your information, the project can go to bid. As a contractor, a bid organized in chronological order is easiest to price accurately. Bids listing actual quantities of units already estimated for the project are the easiest to quote as well as interpret for the customer. All contractors bidding the project are bidding apples to apples versus multiple contractors interpreting blueprints that can vary greatly. This can make bid evaluation confusing. Using unit prices gives the customer lateral movement as the project is in progress to make decisions onsite without renegotiating the contract. Additions and deletions can be made easily from the inception of the contract.

If you provide your contractor with all of the information he needs, you will get the most accurate price for the work. You will also be more likely to address issues before construction starts instead of in the middle of the project. An ill-prepared plan is more likely to sabotage the project even before construction. No construction project is perfect, but it can be a great experience to work-through with the right planning and tools.

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