



Synthetic Turf on the Course

How many of you now have, or have had, some kind of artificial surface at your golf course? I am guessing quite a few. As well you know synthetic turf is no longer just being used at putt-putts. From hitting mats that you put out in the spring to large indoor teaching facilities, the new synthetic turfs have a variety of uses. At some point in the future you may be asked to manage or install some type of a synthetic turf. Because there are different styles of turf for each application, it's important you pick the right one.

Synthetic turf history started in 1965, when the famous AstroTurf was installed in the Astrodome in Houston, Texas. The use of synthetic turf became widespread throughout stadiums and ballparks in the 1970s. The synthetic turfs were used in indoor stadiums where growing turf would not be economically feasible. They were also being installed in outdoor arenas where winter sports destroyed the turf surface. In the late '80s they started to get a bad reputation. The synthetic turf was a harder surface than grass and far less forgiving. The surface seemed to cause more injuries than would have been suffered on a grass surface. Synthetics were also less esthetically pleasing for fans. Artificial turf was banned by some soccer teams in Europe because of injuries. Then in the 21st century the next generation of turf was born. This new turf has a sand and/or crumb rubber infill that is said to be even safer than real turf. It can look like real turf from a distance. Synthetic turfs have now been used for everything from backyards to 18-hole golf courses. That brings us to today, when the most common synthetic turf is made out of polyethylene. The blades of grass are made out of polyethylene fibers that are sewn into some sort of a mat material. Textured nylon is also available. With nylon, the fibers are also

sewn into a mat, but they are woven together to create the turf surface. This nylon surface seems to best resemble bentgrass. Today, over 100 synthetic turf companies and distributors can be found on the internet.

I am going to concentrate on the golf applications for synthetic turf. There are things to look for when judging the quality and the type of synthetic turf you are going to buy for your particular use. Just as with bentgrass greens, the lower the height and the denser the turf the faster the green can be. To judge the turf, bend your sample in half. Compare the number of fibers stitched into the mat. Look also at the pattern of the stitching. That is probably the best way to judge the quality of your samples. If, in your application, the turf is needed



All the best turf starts with a plan. Above are the conceptual drawings of indoor practice facility at Rich Harvest Farms.

only for short chipping and putting, the nylon surface may be the type you need. The nylon will give you a fast surface with little maintenance. For applications that allow longer chipping, where a true reaction to the ball is needed, you will want to lean towards an infill product. The infill will give you the same reaction as a ball hitting a USGA green. In one of our applications we have a sand-filled bunker next to a target green. With the bunker splash of the sand, the target green's turf needed the

(continued on page 7)

infill style material to take the sand from the bunker. There are also mats that duplicate the color, look, and reaction to the club of a real bunker, if real sand is not feasible for you. The U of I has this bunker matting at their home practice facility. For teeing surfaces either application fits. It will come down to the level of maintenance you want to put forth after the installation of the tee. The best surface for the tees that we could find with a low maintenance was the EZ Tee product. From Rye and Blue to St. Augustine and Zoysia, every variety of turf has been duplicated to fit every possible application.

There are a number of locations where it makes sense to install synthetic turf. From basements to rooftops, indoors and out, artificial turf opens a number of doors for customers wanting a turf surface but unable to put down real turf. I have been assigned two different projects at my facility.

The first was to add four tees using synthetic turf with an extensive hardscape around the tees. This teeing area had three existing tees in a heavily treed shoot. Because of limited sunlight, growing grass would be difficult. Removing the trees was not an option. In this project we added a tee to lengthen the course and we updated the landscape and synthetic turf. We used Nova Grass, an infill product. The second project is a 9,000-square-foot indoor practice area in an old horse arena. This area will be used for overnight guests and as a teaching facility for our membership. This project includes a target green for chipping, a sand filled bunker, three EZ Tee teeing surfaces for chipping, fringe and approach shot areas, rough areas, an 1800-square-foot putting green, and even fifteen-foot-tall synthetic trees to add artificial landscaping to the area. Just about any location can be accommodated with synthetic turf.

When you have found your location and know the scope of work for your project, here are some tips for construction. When you are mapping out the area keep the carpet sizes in mind. Fit the dimensions of your project to the dimensions of your carpet rolls in order to limit waste. Example, if the rolls come in a twelve-foot width, you don't want to have a fourteen-foot-wide area. You would be wasting ten feet of material

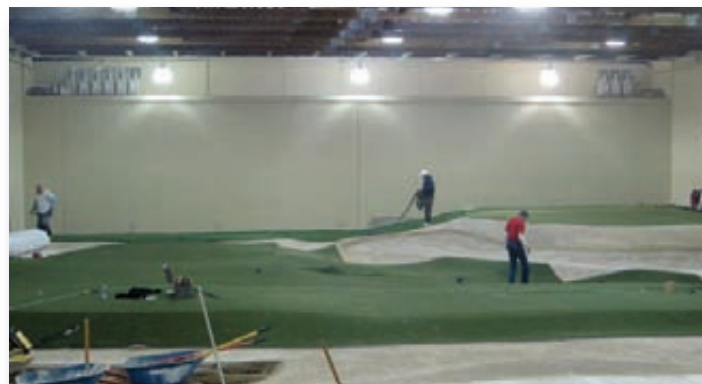
if it couldn't be used somewhere else in the project. Once you have picked the type, size of turf, and the location for your application needs, it's time for the base. The turf can be installed on a couple of surfaces. Crushed aggregate seems to work the best when shaping a green. The turf can also be installed directly on concrete for a tee line at a driving range. Whatever material you install for your base, it must be compacted and smooth so that stretching does not occur in the future. Limit the slope of your green. Be careful not to make your green installation look and act like a putt-putt with a clown nose and a wind mill by adding too much undulation.

I feel synthetic turf is going to help our industry grow. It brings golf to sites that don't have the resources to maintain a traditional facility. Synthetic turf is being used in junior golf facilities. More and more indoor sites are being added to support golf throughout the winter. There are hitting bays in just about every retail golf store. Teeing lines are being installed at virtually every driving range to help preserve turf in the fall and spring. I have even heard of a tournament site that had the membership carry 1x1 foot synthetic hitting mats for ball placement to prevent divots in the fairways before the tournament. Where ever your facility and whatever your synthetic turf application, I hope this article helps you in any decisions you need

to make when tackling your project. Synthetic is not just for putt-putts anymore. **-OC**



A 3-D view the the finished space. Grow lights not included.



The grass is unrolled and the bunker is lined.



The finished practice facility at RHF, ready for play, rain or shine, day or night.