



Faking It

By **Jake Schneider**, Assistant Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

Editors Note: After contributing a few observations under the Miscellany title Jake Schneider joins The Grass Roots regular columnists this month under the title Madtown Musings. We look forward to sharing his opinions and ideas in the future.


After traveling to the Hawkeye State and watching my beloved Badgers get creamed by 23 points on a cold, miserable night in Iowa City with a Rose Bowl berth on the line in 2004, I've never particularly liked anything that had to do with the University of Iowa, and that's putting it mildly. So, it is with a tremendous amount of pain and guilt that I admit that a recent story from our too-close-for-comfort neighbors to the southwest inspired this article.

Beginning, next season, Kinnick Stadium, which doesn't hold a handle to the beautiful confines at Camp Randall, will no longer have natural grass. Instead, the corn-fed boys in yellow and black will be suiting up (and losing, hopefully) on FieldTurf. This conversion means that Penn State, Purdue, Michigan State, and Northwestern will be the only teams in the Big 11 to have natural grass football fields, and if Penn State or Michigan State ever switch, I hope that you have a healthy supply of bottled water and nonperishable food, because the world will surely be coming to an end.

Since it's beginnings in Houston's Astrodome, the merits of artificial turf have long been a point of debate. While AstroTurf was little more than a durable, green carpet laid over a concrete pad that kept athletic trainers employed, FieldTurf and other, similar products in the marketplace today have their merits and are rapidly gaining popularity. This is especially true in areas like Wisconsin, where turf simply isn't able to hold up in the late fall and early winter, when the football season is still in full swing. Naturally, the question relating to us is, "When will artificial turf become common on golf courses." And, while I'm no Nostradamus, my guess is that it'll be here sooner than we think.

Somewhere out there, I'm sure that some guy who's a whole lot smarter than I am is developing an artificial turf that might someday be on the greens of your golf course. In fact, a quick Google search led me to Colorado's Echo Basin Ranch, where a gentleman with a little too much money on his hands is building a 1.2 million square foot golf course. Although I can't ever imagine an entirely artificial course being a whole lot of fun or very practical for that matter, the fake stuff will

probably rear it's plastic head in time because...

Like it or not, restrictions on plant protectants, fertilizers, and water use aren't going away, and it's not a secret that they will likely be tightening in the future. Without these inputs, what would our fairways, greens, and tees look like? "Not very good," would be my answer. When this happens, what are the odds that the golfers will lower their standards for course conditions? Again, "not very good," would be my answer. The good news is that I do believe that most golfers will never accept artificial fairways (taking a divot=broken wrist) or tees, but I could see artificial turf greens being viable. The challenges to developing such a system are many (how would you change the pin placements, for one), but if we can figure out a way to fly to the moon, realistic artificial greens aren't out of the question. It sure would make our jobs a whole lot easier and winterkill would definitely never be an issue, but I really don't want to worry about getting turf toe when I play 18; I'll leave that to my friends in Iowa (lots and lots of turf toes for them). 

Welcome the following New Members to WGCSA!

Paul Cales, Global Greens LLC E
Joe Churchill, Old Seed Solutions E
Brett Hosler, Ozaukee Country Club C
Kyle Kleinschmidt, The Bridges Golf Club, C
Randy Lusher, BASF, E
Brandon Nebl, Mayville Golf Club, SM
Rob Nixon, Rock River Hills GC, SM
Glen Obear, UW-Madison S
Scott Olmer, Northbrook COUNTRY Club
Jeff Orłowski, Milwaukee County Parks SM
Andrew Paxton, UW Madison, S
Jason Rosploch, Grant Park, SM
Michael Rządski, UW Madison, S
Damon Soderberg, Hawk's View Golf Club, SM
William Stein, Minocqua Country Club, SM
Jake Vollbeer, Burris Equipment, E
Tom Wentz, Lebanon Seaboard Corp, E