

# Turf, Natural Grass...What's the Difference?

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Minnesota Vikings

When people think of the Minnesota Vikings playing football, they often think that the Vikings play on synthetic grass (commonly called Turf by the players) in the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome and why on earth would there be a need for a person to do exactly what I do?

Well, first thing you understand is that over 90% of National Football League players prefer to play on Natural Grass. Keeping this in mind and by overlooking the two natural grass playing fields here at Winter Park, which were built to modified USGA Greens specifications in 1981, there is a need for a person with an agronomic background to do what I do. But, the position does not just specify growing grass. Included in the package are maintenance of the field house, with Turf kept at an ever exacting .500" height of cut and a telephone system named after a mythical wizard (maybe he was the only one to figure out how to work it) In addition to the landscaping, parking lots and building maintenance, there is game day set up.

The two natural grass fields that the Vikings practice on are kept at a lengthly 1.50". As a matter of fact the shortest turf we have at Winter Park is the Turf at .500". With the natural grass being kept at a height of cut that most golf courses usually maintain their rough at, sometimes you would think, now what on earth could go wrong? Aside from the stray Pythium visit or maybe a little patch problem, disease is usually held in check. However there is one visitor that happens twice a day in early May for three days, and various camps throughout the summer months, and then the BIG ONE in mid August. It's the final days of training camp and the beginning of the NFL's regular season. The practices start at about 1:00 p.m. and go until 4:45 p.m. and there is just a little RIPPING, TEARING, SPIN MOVES, RIP MOVES AND SWIM MOVES. When you think of torque, think of a finely tuned professional athlete, all tensed up awaiting the cadence of the quarterback, then imagine the average weight of each offensive lineman settle on 12 square inches. Does the word COMPACTION ring a bell? Imagine if you will, a place within your own worst nightmare, a four-wheeler across a putting green. Yes, that's bad, but maybe think of John Randle busting through the line to pay his respects to a Brett Favre look-a-like. Scary thought! Then think of all the equipment available to the players. Normal spikes on the bottom of football shoes are .500", but in cases of grass fields being slightly wet or slippery 5/8" cleats will be installed, or if you're playing at 3-Com Park at high tide, .750" cleats are installed. I don't think Soft Spikes will make in the NFL.

Fields are a very important part of the players daily routine, especially when you consider there are 40.7 million dollars worth of players. I personally feel that the fields not only have to be the absolute best, but they must also



be safe. In my opinion the field should free of ruts. Divots are replaced and a seed-oil mixture added. During down time from play or practice the fields are aerified with GA-60 using 5/8" tines and a 2.5" x 2" pattern. Prior to aerification, an application of 70% KBG/30% PRG is applied to the field at a rate of 2 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft. After the cores are broken up, Milorganite is applied at a rate of 1 lb. N per 1,000 sq. ft. and 70% KBG/30% PRG is applied at a rate of 4 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft. Then the topdressing begins. Using Leitner's 70% micro sand with 30% hypnum, about 22 cubic yards of material is applied to a field.

During the off season (June until mid-August) seeding and topdressing takes place once a month, with applications of specific fungicides with micro-nutrient packages happening every 14 to 21 days or as needed. The fertilizer applications revolve around an application of Milorganite applied between the numbers every three weeks, then 17-3-17 is applied once a month. Just prior to the start of the season 2 lbs. of slow release K will be applied along with a 13-13-13. Then it's time for the grass to acclimate for winter, but you still have to get the grass to grow so the fields heal. About the first of September the only seed used is 100% PRG, at a rate of 8 to 10 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft. Any divot that anyone makes is filled in with a seed and soil mix, and covered with Penn-Mulch. As winter starts moving in and as the days start to shorten and cool off, a Tytar blanket is laid from one end zone to the other to help stimulate germination. This, of course, is done after the area between the hash marks where the team has been practicing has been aerified and seeded.

Years ago in Sod School we were taught the fundamentals of turf-grass management, aerification, topdressing, slicing, seeding, rolling, mowing, irrigation and fertilization. When you remember the basics and how to apply them properly to your particular situation, your job can be made a lot easier.