

# MORE USEABLE SPACE FOR THE PRACTICE FIELD



By Melvin J. Robey and W. H. Daniel

**W**ITH today's need for more space for buildings and recreation, it's time for the athletic organizations to take a hard look at the infringement upon their football practice field areas.

More and more, school and industrial administrators are deciding to use one or more of the practice fields for additional classroom buildings or parking lots. With this happening, it often forces a coach to use the regular playing field for a practice area or if he is fortunate, he will have at least one practice field. But he usually has to share it with the band, pep clubs, gym classes and other organizations that need outdoor recreational areas.

What the coach needs is a definite plan on how to get maximum wear out of a minimum of turf area. This can be done in a variety of ways. One way is building portable or removable goal posts which allows the end zone, and areas in back of them, to be used for practice. Purdue University has done this on two practice fields. On both fields an additional 25 yards was picked up beyond the goal posts at each end. This changed the length of each practice field from 100 yards to 150 yards. The additional practice area allows the coaches to spread out more during practice and thus spread the wear and tear which means that the grass will last longer and give a more uniform playing surface.

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Another method of increasing the practice area is to extend the yard lines as far as possible beyond the normal width (160 ft.) of a football field. This can be done easily if there is unused grass on the sides of the practice fields; this not only gives a team additional practice area but helps to keep the team out of the center of the field where wear is heaviest.

The extra practice area is of no value to the team if the head coach does not get the assistant coaches and team to use these areas. The center of any practice field should be used only when absolutely necessary, this being when the team practices kick-off returns, punt returns, full scrimmages, and passing drills. The individual drills should be done along the side lines and at the ends of the practice fields. Save the center of the field for when it is really needed. When possible, run the plays from the side line towards the center.

It is also important to keep the players moving around in designated areas so as not to wear the grass out in one spot in one day. Run four or five plays, or a single drill, then move the ball or players to another spot. The key to maintaining grass on the field throughout the season is not to practice too long in any one spot and to stay out of the center of the field as much as possible.

The use of the stadium field or practice field for band practice or any other event should be strictly

controlled. Under no circumstances should anyone be allowed on the fields when it is raining or when the field is wet. It is at this time that the most serious damage can be done to a field. When the field is extremely wet, the coach should consider cancelling practice or use the side line areas for a limited practice session only. The use of tennis shoes, or football shoes with very short cleats (less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch), would also help to conserve the turf on wet days, or any time for that matter.

The best policy to follow in order to maintain good grass, and for player safety, is never allow anyone or any organization on the fields except at half-time during a game. The heavy use of the fields during the week will only lead to a deterioration of the turf which has been shown to be the cause of many player injuries. If the fields are practiced on heavily down the center and allowed to become worn out the chances of an increase in player injuries is enhanced. With the proper maintenance and player use of the field there is less chance for serious injuries to occur.

Today's coaches and turf managers need to be alert to the problems of maintaining fields which already are too small for their needs. To do so means to use every available square foot of area and to do it wisely. To maintain the grass throughout the season requires a conscientious effort on behalf of all the people involved.