SPORTS TURF

by Ron Hall, assistant editor

Grass safer again

"It's almost as good as..."

young athletic trainer, put that phrase to the test in a recent study of grass and artificial turf football fields and discovered that "almost" isn't good enough. Not when it comes to the safety of athletes anyway.

"Artificial turf contributes an additional risk of injury," Comly, now working as a therapist at the Coatesville Veteran's Hospital near Philadelphia, writes in a comprehensive comparison of football injuries in two Eastern universities, Temple and West Chester. Temple plays on an artificial surface, West Chester on grass. Since there were 148 members on each of the two teams, Comly feels her comparison is valid.

She used data reported from the 1982 season to the National Athletic Injury/Illness Recording Service (NAIRS) at Penn State University in her 47-page study. NAIRS is a computerized surveillance system designed to help school policy makers make meaningful sports safety decisions. Team trainers of member schools supply weekly injury reports to NAIRS during the season.

Her findings?

There were more injuries on the synthetic surface than on grass, 110-50. The number of minor injuries was greater by a 72-27 margin on the artificial field, "significant" injuries by a 38-23 gap.

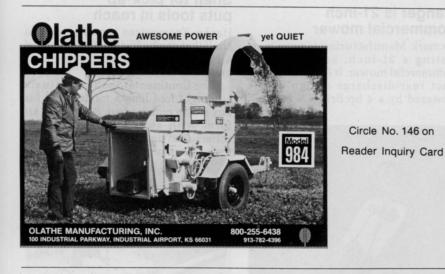
Proponents of synthetic turf point Carol Ann Comly, an ambitious to the intensive use their fields can support. They claim annual maintenance costs are lower, and artificial turf requires a less technically trained management team. These points are arguable.

Grass fields have the benefits of being less expensive to build and less expensive to repair. In the long run, a quality grass athletic field is more economical than an artificial surface because of the need to periodically replace worn synthetic surfaces. Turf is also measurably cooler during warm-weather sporting events.

Comly, who has coached and officiated grade school field hockey, and lacrosse, writes the controversy is 'open to further investigation." Her open-minded approach is sensible. It might be that blanket condemnations of synthetic are short-sighted. Even in the turf industry. The use of synthetic grass can probably be justified in areas where the likelihood of establishing quality turf is questionable, perhaps even in conjunction with turf, such as along the sidelines of a turf football field.

The question of player safety, however, remains the first consideration.

The wonder is that field managers, particularly those with the grass-orsynthetic decisions, slide so easily to the debatable convenience of synthetic even in the face of studies like Ms. Comly's.



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