Multi-Sport Facilities: The True Three-Season Athletes

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By Mary Helen Sprecher

Forget about the kids playing football, basketball and lacrosse. Today’s three-season athletes are the fields that host multiple sports during the year. And as communities become more land-locked, space for athletic facilities is at a premium. Therefore, it behooves administrators to invest in a multi-use field.

It’s a market in which synthetic turf has come into its heyday. After all, there aren’t a lot of natural fields that can stand up to the rigors of field hockey, lacrosse, football, soccer and anything else a school can dispense. And the cost, which was once prohibitive, becomes more amenable when schools can reuse facilities without having to rest and care for them between games.
Size Matters

In reviewing the needs of a school, it is essential to take into consideration the following:

- The sports that will be hosted
- The size of each field needed (according to its national governing body for the appropriate level of play, such as high school or college)
- The prioritization of sports (in other words, you need to decide which sport is the most important to the school; we will cover why in a minute)

Calculating field size means going with the largest dimensions necessary. So, for example, if a field is to host football (in which the field is a standard length of 360’ and a standard width of 160’), as well as field hockey (300’ long and 180’ wide), the field must be, as a minimum, large enough to satisfy the standard length for football and the standard width for hockey. (Note: Dimensions are set by the governing bodies for sports at various levels; it is essential to make sure you are working with the most up to date set of rules prior to the design phase). In addition, build in safe overrun areas, which will vary, depending upon the sport hosted.

In general, building a multi-sport field means making compromises. If, for example, you are building a soccer field to NCAA regulations, the width will need to be 210’ (minimum) and 225’ (optimum); however, if your football field is only 160’ wide, spectators will be sitting further from the action than they might prefer. Always follow the rules of the governing body, however.

If your field will include a track, make sure you are working with a builder who has expertise in track and field facilities; there is both an art and a science in determining the correct track configuration for your facility.

Playing Lines and Field Markings

Going back to our bullet points earlier, and also to the previous point about making compromises when it comes to multi-use fields: Unlike a natural grass field, synthetic turf markings won’t grow out and can’t be mowed off. Those markings will need to be permanent, so it becomes time, first, to decide which sports should take priority. Lines will need to be different colors and it makes sense to select the brightest lines for the dominant sports. As a result, a field might have white lines for football and yellow for soccer, maroon for field hockey, while lines for still further sports might be made in navy or silver. The ultimate goal is to allow players and officials to have a clear sense of boundaries at all times. Many national governing bodies specify the line colors for their sport, something else that needs to be considered in the planning process.

Some field builders recommend the use of small squares, also called ‘ticks,’ on the field, to denote certain distances for respective sport lines and then paint those lines on in season with a removable paint. This practice eliminates having multiple sets of permanent lines. (Check with
your field builder for a recommendation before using any product.)

Photos:

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Albuquerque Public Schools Nusenda CU Community Stadium – Courtesy of Robert Cohen LLC,
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