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Tuesday, March 17, 2009

Case Study: Cooling Off Synthetic Turf

By DANNY FASOLD



WHITTIER COLLEGE HAS ALWAYS BEEN HOME TO A WIDE range of athletes with a lot to show for their mettle. The Whittier, California-based school has captured 26 conference titles through its football program alone in a 100-year span, and its lacrosse program has also roused its fair share of competition. But countless years of wear-and- tear and perpetual lawn maintenance took a grueling toll on the school's renowned Chief Newman Football Field, and the time finally came in the summer of 2008 for the school to give back to its athletes by giving the field the revamping it deserved. Not only would this make the field more playable for its football department, it would enable it to be used for multiple events yearround, such as soccer, lacrosse, cheerleading competitions and more, helping to generate additional revenue to Whittier's athletic programs.

The school decided it would bring its football field up to the speed of the 21st century by converting it entirely to synthetic turf. "We added up the numbers and found that the field would soon pay for itself by lowering labor, maintenance and irrigation costs," says Rob Coleman, athletic director at Whittier College. "It would also generate revenue from outside activities, such as soccer leagues and sports camps, which help support our athletic programs."

The benefits such a field would reap were staggering. There would be no re-seeding required, no applying of any fertilizers or pesticides, no mowing of any kind. The site could be used year-round in nearly all weather conditions and the surface would be safe and consistent. Maintenance would cease to be much of an issue, and the long-term savings generated from such a move would be considerable.

There was only one problem in going synthetic: Once summer rolled around, the field would get much hotter than standard grass fields. And since hotter temperatures are the last thing athletes need when pushing themselves to the max, something would have to be done. Byrom-Davey, a San Diego-based company, received the contract by the school to design and install the field. To handle the hot temperatures, Byrom-Davey decided to install a cooling

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system. The system's capabilities were impressive: It would provide 125 feet of water coverage at 100 gallons per minute, each sprinkler running for only a minute long. A groundskeeper would activate each sprinkler one at a time simply by using an ICC Remote to connect to the Hunter ICC Controller. This would "spritz" the turf's surface in less than 10 minutes, bringing it back down to a cool, comfortable level.

"Rinsing and dusting off the surface every week or two, especially on a high-demand field like Chief Newman, was a very practical idea," says Jim McAllister, regional representative for Sprinturf, the company that handled the installation of the synthetic turf. "During hot summer months, it keeps the playing surface cool and comfortable and prevents dehydration."

Installers laid a perforated drain pipe around the perimeter of the 80,000 sq. ft. field. A flat drain was then placed in a herringbone pattern on an impermeable membrane. Before the all-rubber infill carpet was laid down, the base was built up with four inches of aggregate stone.

From there, eight M-125 valve-in-head sprinklers were installed around the field. These sprinklers featured two extra-high capacity nozzles for an extended throw radius of 125 feet, a four-inch pop-up height and a 22-degree trajectory. In addition, the sprinklers' covers were colored a green, grass-like tint to blend them right into the field. "The M-125s provide enough long-distance coverage so that we only needed cooling sprinklers along the edge of the field," says Pankow. "This way, we were able to minimize safety issues in the playing area."

Byrom-Davey topped the project off through the use of Underhill's 2Wire system. The company felt this was a more economical way to install while also allowing for future expansions. The 2Wire made it possible for the school to run just two lines from the controller to the sprinklers. A third wire was installed to serve as a back-up.

Today, the people of Whittier College are happy with their new football field. Able to deliver 100 gallons of water a minute, the field can be cooled and cleaned in a matter of minutes. It now hosts a number of sports such as lacrosse, soccer, cheerleading competitions and a variety of local high school events to boot. "The field has become a multidimensional facility," says Coleman. "Activities are scheduled nearly round-the-clock."

With a makeover like this, Whittier's new and improved Chief Newman Field is sure to serve athletes for many years to come.

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