

New surface to limit injuries, improve cuts

BY BRANDON SCHULTE
Staff writer

Looking at it from afar, the first time Nebraska receiver Matt Davison saw FieldTurf, he couldn't believe it wasn't grass.

He was fooled by the grass-like turf embedded in sand and grounded-up tires, which now covers the playing surface at Memorial Stadium and the Cook Pavilion.

"When we pulled up to the place, I thought it was a grass field," said Davison, who was included in a trip to test the FieldTurf last March. "It looked like a grass field that's just been mowed - from a ways away."

The number of non-contact injuries associated with NU's artificial playing surfaces - coupled with the fact that the turf was scheduled to be replaced after this season - led to the decision to install FieldTurf earlier this month as a safer alternative.

Natural grass came under consideration, as did AstroTurf, but in the end FieldTurf set itself apart from the rest. Coaches and administrators moved up the surface change one season, and workers scurried to install it in both Memorial Stadium and Cook Pavilion in time for fall camp.

FieldTurf looks and feels like grass, yet should be safer than turf. It eliminates carpet burn, while at the same time does away with the cumbersome wear-and-tear of a grass field.

"We investigated different types of grass," Nebraska Football Coach Frank Solich said. "We investigated all types of artificial surfaces. This was the one that started to separate itself a little bit. Once the players had a chance to get on it, they really liked it."

Before making a decision, Solich and several players, including Davison, toured fields in Amarillo, Texas, and Wichita, Kan.

To test the surface, they ran in a straight line, did agility drills and even wet down the field. It didn't matter if they wore cleats or tennis shoes, Davison said, the traction was still the same.

"We got down on it, and we tried out three or four different types of

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FRANK SOLICH
NU head coach

shoes, and they all worked pretty well," he said. "The footing was real good, and it seemed to be non-abrasive."

As with any new surface, the speed in which action can take place on it is important. So far, Solich said, the FieldTurf plays somewhere in between the speed of grass and turf.

Junior free safety Clint Finley, another player who visited the fields, said the best part about the new playing surface is the way it makes his knees feel.

Because it gives more than turf, the likelihood of injury is lessened with the decreased stress on tendons and ligaments.

For someone who missed three games with an injured left knee last year and battled tendonitis the rest of the season, Finley said cutting on FieldTurf is better than either grass or turf.

"When you're on turf, you get a jolting stop," Finley said. "On this stuff, you make a nice little cut. You might slip a little bit, but just enough to save you."

"It has a lot better footing than natural grass. If you make too hard of a cut, it will just slide right from under you and make a big divot. This stuff won't do that at all."

Despite the reduced risk of injury provided by the new turf, FieldTurf can't prevent all injuries. Starting tackle Jason Schwab found that out when he went down with a knee injury in a contact pass-protection drill Monday. Solich said the injury would have occurred on any surface.

"I don't think any surface is void from injury," Solich said. "In a contact sport you're always capable of injuries. But it should really cut down on non-contact injuries."

John Ingram, NU's director of

athletic facilities, said the field should cut down on the effect of weather, too. He said that rain should drain much faster on this surface than the old turf. How it reacts to snow, however, is anyone's guess, since the surface has yet to come in contact with it.

"So far, I like what I see," Solich said. "We'll let it play out a little further before we jump up and down. I think it will prove to be a very good surface to play ball on."

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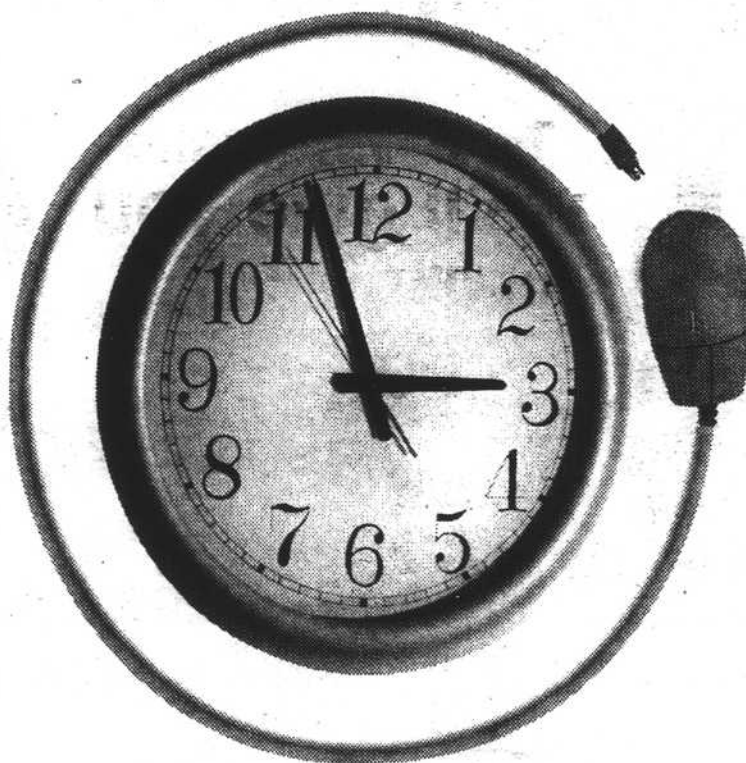
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