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Cowboys laying first field at team's new stadium

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Cowboys Stadium officials aren't wasting time trying to prove the versatility of the new \$1.15 billion facility.

After the spaceship-looking structure opened with two big-ticket concerts, crews are installing the artificial playing surface for the first sporting event: a CONCACAF Gold Cup soccer doubleheader July 19.

Up next are two football fields — one for the Cowboys, another for college and high school games. But not before real grass is trucked in for another soccer match.

Cowboys Stadium general manager Jack Hill said the natural playing surface was a contractual requirement for a Club America-Chelsea exhibition on July 26. He said crews will be ready.

"Keep in mind that we may have a rodeo, we may have a motocross dirt event, we may have monster truck," Hill said. "Always in the back of our mind, we knew there would be a lot more here than just football or soccer. We built it with the ultimate flexibility in mind."

But they don't plan to have a parade of grass fields. For instance, Hill said the 2011 Super Bowl will be played on the artificial surface, called RealGrass Matrix turf.

"Natural grass just brings in a whole lot of other issues," said Hill, adding that the stadium can accommodate a system for watering the grass. "Nothing against natural grass. It's beautiful. But, from a maintenance standpoint, there's quite a bit to it."

Hill said the initial installation of the three artificial turf fields will take about a week apiece. Once the fields are installed, though, they can be changed out in about a day, he said.

The Cowboys make their debut Aug. 21 in a preseason game against the Tennessee Titans — two days after Paul McCartney plans the venue's third concert. So their field will be built before the concert, Hill said.

After initial installation, machines can roll up the turf in segments about 5 yards wide, and those not in use will be stored under the stadium, said Bruce Layman, vice president of Sportfield LLC, the Austin-based company providing the turf.

The turf will be slightly thicker for football, Layman said, and will be separated from the stadium's concrete floor by a half-inch pad designed to allow water to drain through it.

Hill said the potentially high volume of college games drove the decision to have three turfs, offering more flexibility for issues such as sponsorships.


In the stadium's first year, there will be five college games, including the Big 12 championship and the Cotton Bowl. The bowl game moved from the Dallas stadium that bears its name.

The Cowboys' first regular season in their new home will also be interrupted by a U2 concert in October and a Texas-North Carolina basketball game in December. The stadium will host next year's NBA All-Star game and the 2014 Final Four.

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