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Dallas Cowboys' new stadium to feature three separate synthetic turf fields

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By JEFF MOSIER / The Dallas Morning News
jmosier@dallasnews.com

ARLINGTON – The Dallas Cowboys haven't booked a soccer game at their new stadium, but they're already planning to buy a removable field for the other "football."

The annual Cotton Bowl game will also have its own field with permanent markings separate from the field the Cowboys will use. The new stadium in Arlington will be the only one in the NFL with three separate fields for different sporting events, the turf manufacturer announced Tuesday.

"This is the only stadium in the NFL that has the option to have as many different kinds of fields as they want and can change out for every event," said Reed J. Seaton, CEO of Hellas Construction.

The Cowboys have purchased two separate football fields and notified Hellas, installer and manufacturer, that they intend to buy a soccer field too. The football fields will roll up into 41 separate 6,000-pound wheels for storage. Each strip of synthetic turf is 15 feet by 172 feet.

This is similar to systems in place at the Alamodome in San Antonio, although that stadium has just one field.

From the beginning, the Cowboys have said they intended for this \$1.1 billion stadium to be a multipurpose venue. It already has a Super Bowl, NBA All-Star Game, college football bowl game and a NCAA men's Final Four basketball tournament scheduled. An application has also been submitted to host the NCAA lacrosse Final Four, and the Cowboys have mentioned that they're interested in hosting World Cup soccer.

Mr. Seaton said that swapping out the fields – which takes a little more than 24 hours – allows the Cowboys to customize the surfaces for different sports. The soccer field would probably have less cushioning and shorter synthetic grass blades.

On the football fields, the standard markings, such as the Cotton Bowl logo, Cowboys star and boundary lines, won't be painted after the turf is manufactured. The logos and markings will be created by coloring the individual strands of polyethylene yarn that make up the fields.

Mr. Seaton said he also believes that removing the field when it's not needed could extend its life. Stadiums that host concerts, tractor pulls and other events usually place plywood or other materials on top of the field to protect the turf.

Bruce Hardy, Texas Stadium's manager, said the turf at his venue has been resilient, even when

thousands of music fans or tons of trucks weigh down the plywood covering the field.

"It doesn't even hurt it," Mr. Hardy said. "We've had Billy Graham for four nights, and we've had rock concerts here. In that case, we put a fireproof tarp over it."

Still, Mr. Hardy said he guesses that the new field will be 25 percent to 50 percent better. Both stadiums use Sportfield's RealGrass turf, but the turf in Arlington will be a newer version with 50 percent more fiber ends that mimic grass blades and longer fibers. It will also have more give, like real grass and earth, and also be more uniform throughout the field, Mr. Seaton said.

This same brand of turf can also be found at many high school football stadiums, including Colleyville Heritage.

Erica Rabhan, a spokeswoman for the Synthetic Turf Council, a nonprofit trade group, said technology and affordability has improved so much that high schools often have professional quality fields.

She said a group of Cincinnati Bengals football players visited a local high school that had just installed new turf. "They said, 'Wow. This is better than ours,' " Ms. Rabhan said.

Mr. Seaton said the material in the new field will be identical to some high school fields, but the density of the artificial grass strands will be higher. He said there's been an embrace of synthetic turf as it's evolved from the rock-hard AstroTurf blamed for many sports injuries to new designs that better imitate the feel of a grass field.

Mr. Hardy said he doesn't see cases of "turf burn" like he did in the early days of artificial turf.

"They just keep improving," he said. "Who would have thought they could have improved it from the last time?"