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## Katy ISD schools to practice football on artificial turf

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When the season begins Aug. 10, football players in Katy ISD finally will practice the way they play — on artificial turf.

Katy ISD athletic director Rusty Dowling said last week that the turf installation at four high schools already was complete. The fields at Cinco Ranch and Seven Lakes are days from being done.

“We’re just right down to the end of completion, and it’s really remarkable because Hellas (Construction) has worked every day during the summer to bring in these six fields,” Dowling said.

“It’s hard enough doing one field but they were doing six.”

Hellas is the company that put in the synthetic turf at the Cowboys’ new stadium. They upgraded the six high school practice fields in Katy ISD for \$5.2 million — a bargain, Dowling says.

“Our campus fields are used more than any other fields that we have, even more so than Rhodes (Stadium),” Dowling said. “They’re used for sub-varsity games, junior high games, practices, and then a lot of the other outdoor sports.

“Because of that usage, we noticed over the last couple of years that the wear and tear on our fields was becoming significant. It was getting to the point where, from a maintenance standpoint, it was extremely difficult for us to keep up the fields at a quality level that would support all the activity that goes on there.”

All that maintenance was time-consuming and expensive, and the wear and tear was making the fields dangerous. The remaining grass fields are rock-hard, having baked all summer in record heat.

“The weather that we’ve had this summer is absolutely reflected on the quality of our grass practice fields,” Dowling said.

“Over at the synthetic turf fields, you’ve got a consistent, stable surface all the time. That’s what so beneficial to the athletes.

“Every time they get on that synthetic turf field, they know the footing is safe and secure, and it doesn’t matter if you practice on one area of the field over and over, you’re not going to wear it down.”

The school district also upgraded the field house and press box at Rhodes this summer.

The locker rooms in the field house were expanded and booths were built outside the press box, giving coaches much-needed room and freeing up space inside for scouts and media.

“It gives them more room,” Dowling said. “The

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fact is with technology changing, with the way we film games and so on, so much of what coaches use is up in those booths and we just run out of room.”

Dowling said when the current projects are complete the district will take a step back to evaluate what's next. But for now, no other projects are on tap.

“With six high schools and 12 junior highs, we have an ongoing list of things we want to take a look at,” Dowling said.

“We try to get everything on a proper rotation. Sometimes it's hard because of increasing usage, but we're always looking into trying to improve our facilities just to make sure the kids have the best possible environment they can.

“But we had some major projects this summer and it kept us real busy.”

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