



ON THE SIDELINES

WITH KRISTI SCALES

A QUICK TURNAROUND

Q. How does the Cowboys Stadium field turf get reconfigured for football games when other teams play at the stadium? Are whole sections of the turf replaced or covered?

— N. Ogozalek, *Soddy-Daisy, Tenn.*

A. The entire playing surface used for Cowboys games is removed and replaced with another, depending on the event at Cowboys Stadium. Flexibility was a key element in the stadium's design. Installed by Hellas Construction, the Matrix Soft Top Removable System is the country's first removable roll-up turf system with three different field configurations: pro football, college football and soccer.

Sure, you would want a separate field for soccer and football, but why do you need a different field for NFL and college football? Can't the crew simply replace or paint over the blue star at midfield or the blue "Cowboys" end zones with the logos for the college teams? Actually, no, unless you want extra hash marks.

NFL hash marks are 18' 6" apart from each other. Why that amount? Because they are the same width apart as the uprights of the goal posts. In college, the hash marks are 40' apart. That's a big discrepancy, the NFL hash marks compared to college.

Have you ever watched a game and noticed two sets of hash marks running the length of the field, looking like double train tracks? That's probably an older multi-purpose stadium that hosts both college and pro games, but doesn't change the surface depending on the teams involved.

How does the crew at Cowboys Stadium change the fields? Let's use last weekend's football marathon on Oct. 9-10 as an example. The Aggies and Razorbacks played Saturday, followed by the Cowboys and Titans Sunday. The crew had less than 24 hours to change the field, but it has had fast turnarounds before. Back in January between the Cotton Bowl and a Cowboys-Eagles game, the crew of about 50 workers started around 5 p.m. Saturday and swapped out the other surface before 10 a.m. Sunday for the 3:15 p.m. kickoff.

The first thing the crews roll out is the drainage mat, which is the lowest level of the surface and base for the turf. Then the strips of Sport Field soft-top turf, each 15 feet wide, are rolled over the drainage mat, across the width of the field from sideline-to-sideline. The crewmembers roll the first strip between the 50- and 45-yard lines, then work their way toward the west end zone, then go back to midfield and work toward the east end zone. The yard markers and hash marks, etc., are already on the strips. Each strip is attached to the drainage mat with hook-and-loop fasteners.

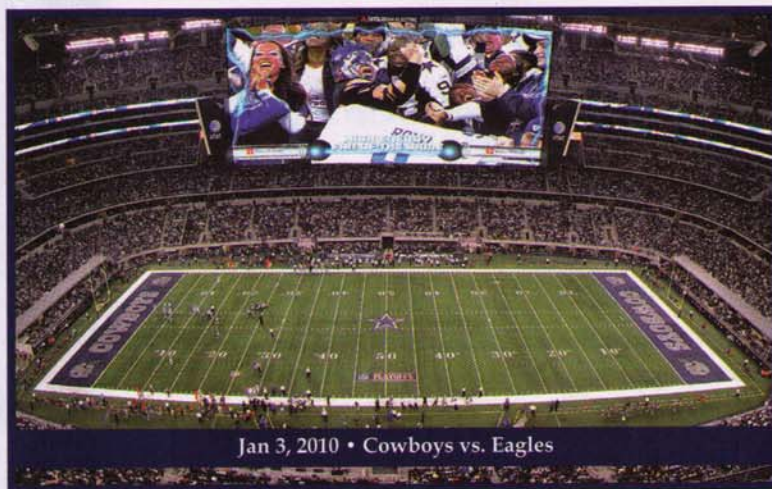
The workers then spread (they use the term "groom") little rubber pellets into the turf to create a cushion and reduce slipping. They also use a machine that looks like a street sweeper to help spread the rubber. It reminds me of watching the Zamboni driver at a hockey game go back and forth between periods.

Have you watched a game on TV and seen a player plant his foot to make a cut, then noticed dark little pellets flying up around his foot? Those are the bits of rubber and they're certainly pesky. When a player gets sweaty and falls to the ground, the pellets stick to his arms or neck. They can also get in a player's eyes. Heck, just standing on the sideline, they get inside your shoes and stick to your socks.

That's a quick version of the quick-change system for the playing field. And while the crewmembers and designers of this innovative "removable system" deserve our admiration and respect, I'd like to also recognize another hard-working group of stadium folks: the employees who clean the 286 concession points-of-sale and the 1,600 toilets. That's right, 1,600.



Jan 2, 2010 • Cotton Bowl • Mississippi vs. Oklahoma St.



Jan 3, 2010 • Cowboys vs. Eagles

Do you have a question about the Cowboys or life on an NFL sideline? If so, email Kristi at KScales@DallasCowboys.net or write to: Kristi Scales, Dallas Cowboys Radio Network, One Cowboys Parkway, Irving, TX 75063