

For Immediate Release July 28, 2009

University of Tennessee Partners with AstroTurf® on \$1.5 Million Research Center

Facility focuses on performance and safety of natural and synthetic turf fields

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – After more than a year of intense planning, The University of Tennessee has partnered with AstroTurf®, the iconic synthetic grass brand, to create the Center for Safer Athletic Fields, which will compare natural grass playing surfaces to synthetic surfaces. With the goal of improving athletic performance and reducing injuries, this initiative will provide the most comprehensive, on-going comparison of synthetic surfaces to natural grass.

Located at the UT Institute of Agriculture's East Tennessee Research and Education Center in Knoxville, the new turfgrass center's geographic location will enable scientists to conduct research on a variety of surfaces from both cool and warm season climates.

The unique outdoor research facility will comprise 60 small-scale athletic research fields constructed from a variety of playing surfaces. UT turfgrass scientists will compare the safety and performance of synthetic playing surfaces to natural grass surfaces. Field qualities will range from those employed for professional-level sports to surfaces used by schools, public parks and recreation fields.

While determining the safety and performance of AstroTurf® products compared to various natural turfgrass systems, UT turfgrass scientists will also monitor these relationships over time. Additionally, they will evaluate the environmental impacts of each system. The research should lead to the development of new, more accurate methods for testing the safety and performance of all synthetic turf systems.

Dr. John Sorochan, associate professor and turfgrass specialist with the Department of Plant Sciences in the UT College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, has one of the most extensive sports turf research programs in the country with more than 15 years experience. He is a board member of the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA).

Dr. Jim Brosnan, assistant professor and turfgrass specialist has developed tools for testing sports turf surfaces. He is the STMA representative to the American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM). The UT Turfgrass Team is rounded out by Tom Samples, UT Extension turfgrass specialist and Brandon Horvath, a turfgrass pathologist.

Together the team has developed turfgrass management programs for sports field managers and has served as consultants to the National Football League, Major League Baseball and professional soccer teams. They advise and consult internationally with sports field managers for cricket, soccer, football, golf, baseball and Olympic venues.

"This is a pioneering effort in conducting research with an emphasis on athletic field safety," Brosnan said. "Historically, sports turf research and maintenance have not been well supported. We are honored to partner with AstroTurf®, the industry's leader in product development. Because of our vision for a comprehensive research project, we selected the only partner that controls all facets of synthetic turf manufacturing from polymer development to field installation."

“Advancing the science behind our products is critical to delivering the best solutions for athletes and the sports turf industry,” noted Bryan Peeples, President of AstroTurf®. “This research partnership demonstrates AstroTurf’s® commitment to enabling our industry to provide the safest systems for the players and the environment.”

Natural surfaces will be planted with bermudagrass, Kentucky bluegrass and others. Both mechanical and human studies will be performed to create “real play” conditions. Rod Walters, world-renowned in the athletic training industry, helped with the design and provided input on the infrastructure for the research areas to be involved in human performance and biomechanics. The research will be scientifically-based for statistical analysis.

“AstroTurf® is taking a leadership role in research in this area,” said Dr. John Sorochan. “They want to know how their product performs -- especially compared to natural grass -- and find ways to make it as safe as possible for their customers and the athletes that play on it.”

“We are interested in credible, unbiased, fact-based research to test our products,” added Peeples. “Taking the lead in developing standards that do not exist today allows us to develop the best products. When a client says ‘Show me the data,’ we will have what they need to make an informed decision.”

The project will also further education for University of Tennessee students. “At the UT Institute of Agriculture, research, teaching and outreach go hand in hand. This project will enable us to enhance our teaching programs in that we will be able to add another level to our curriculum to train and educate future sports turf practitioners,” Sorochan said.

Construction of the Center will take six to eight weeks with ground breaking to take place this summer or early fall.

About AstroTurf®

For many athletes and sport enthusiasts, the iconic AstroTurf® brand has redefined the way the game is played. The company offers advanced, state-of-the-art, multi-sport and specialized synthetic turf systems with proprietary engineered technologies, leveraging the industry’s only vertically integrated manufacturing system. A growing number of high schools, colleges, professional sports teams and municipalities continue to select AstroTurf®-branded products for their premium quality, technical superiority and safety. The company recently debuted its AstroReflect™ heat-reducing technology in its GameDay Grass™ systems at the St. Louis Rams’ new synthetic practice field at Rams Park. AstroTurf’s® sister company, SYNlawn™, is the leading innovator serving the synthetic landscape market. To learn more, visit www.astroturfusa.com or www.synlawn.com

The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture provides instruction, research and public service through the UT College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources; the UT College of Veterinary Medicine; UT AgResearch, including its system of 10 research and education centers; and UT Extension with offices in all 95 Tennessee counties.

For more information on the UT Institute of Agriculture turfgrass program, visit <http://www.turf.tennessee.edu/> or <http://www.tennesseeturfgrassweeds.org/Pages/default.aspx>

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