



Athletic Field Design

Plan Ahead for Football Field Marking

By Mike Hebrard, Athletic Field Design

After spending so much time getting the turf into shape for the football season, it makes sense to devote a few hours before major games to field marking. The best groundskeepers know that marking a football field is a lot like managing the dirt of a baseball field the players, coaches and fans. Don't wait until the week before the first game to think about field marking. Painting takes planning and practice. But once you learn the tricks, it provides better results than chalk in not much more time.

Paints manufactured specifically for turf will not harm or kill turf. They are brighter and last longer than chalk. It's wise to check the field dimensions before every season. Mark the corners permanently with sections of two-inch metal pipe driven into the ground slightly below the surface. The corners can then be located in future years with a metal detector. The metal pipe can also be used for securing the cord to mark the field. A tape measure should always be used for marking yard lines. Cords or string can stretch and provide inaccurate measurements. However, nylon cords used properly can save time. When stretched tight from one edge of the field to the other, they provide a straight line to guide marking machinery. A spool connected to a cordless electric drill can wind the cord up quickly.

First stretch a cord down the sidelines from one corner pipe to the other. Then use a tape measure to mark every 15 feet along the tight cord. Place stakes where the yard line meets the sidelines. Stretch a cord across the field between the stakes. This is the guide for the sprayer. If you have two cords, one person can be painting while two other workers advance the second cord to the next yard line. Cords should also be used to indicate the location of the hash marks and numbers. Accurate spacing is necessary so the stencils will be lined up evenly for painting.

Hash marks can be made with stencils or with a guide. A guide can be made out of 1 1/2 inch PVC pipe, tees and elbows. Such a guide should be 15 feet long so it only has to be moved once between yard lines. Tees and elbows mark the location of each hash mark. This pipe guide can be broken down quickly to move it from

one field to another. Stencils for numbers and arrows should be at least four feet tall for the numbers to be clearly visible to the players, officials and fans. Stencils can be made out of heavy plastic or plywood. The plastic stencils are easier to store and transport.

If you want to decorate the field, stay in the middle and avoid the end zones. Most of the fans sit in the middle of the stands. Marking the end zones can take more time and material than marking the entire field. If you want an end zone design, keep it simple, such as a single letter outlined with a dark color. Put the home team's logo in the center of the field and forget the end zones if you can. Logos, especially multicolored logos, require a good stencil (or stencils) and some skill. The easiest design is a white background outlined with the team's color. Spraying dark colors on top of white makes them look brighter. The white paint actually protects the turf from some of the harmful components of other colors. Use latex paints designed specifically for turf even if they cost more. Designs will frequently take more than one coat of paint. The paint needs to be diluted in water. Using warm water can help the paint dry faster.

Keep all people and animals away from the area while the paint dries. Some sports turf managers like to mix herbicides or growth retardants with paint to kill or stunt the turf underneath the lines. This may be helpful when marking practice fields, but it's not a good idea for stadiums. Line marking machinery is always a good investment because it saves time and helps you do a better job. Use quick-change nozzles with interchangeable filters. A long spray gun reduces the amount of bending over you have to do. Once you get a routine down with the right equipment, you may even want to experiment with some "free-hand" designs. After all, painting is an art whether it's on canvas or on turf.