

SPORTS FEATURE

Omniurf: The answer to York's turf woes

By JAMES HOGGETT

"Rain, rain go away" is a familiar cry from most varsity coaches who have had to put up with the adverse weather we've had this year.

As a result of exceptionally heavy rainfalls this season, many games had to be cancelled due to the poor field conditions. When games were played, players were often forced to wallow ankle deep in a bog that once resembled a marked field.

Playing under these conditions is very dangerous for the athletes as they risk sustaining injuries ranging from broken bones to torn ligaments.

"The grass cover is completely destroyed," said Stan Horseman, assistant superintendent of the grounds at York. "A good field should have some kind of sub-soil drainage, something that we lack. As a result, our soil cannot accommodate all this rain we've been having."

One possible solution to this field dilemma would be the installation of an artificial turf surface. This suggestion, however, was greeted negatively by most of York's coaches.

"Soccer becomes a very inferior game on artificial turf," Yeowomen soccer coach David Bell said. Yeomen soccer coach Norm Crandles agreed, saying that "for practice purposes I can see some use for it, but not for playing on. Artificial turf does not lend itself well to soccer and is very injurious to players."

Frank Cosentino, head coach of the football Yeomen agrees. "The thing I would be concerned about playing on an artificial turf is the carpet burns sustained by players falling on the turf and the damage to the joints from the constant pounding. Artificial turf is like playing on concrete."

True enough. The conventional artificial turf surfaces of today are called sport's worst disease. Many injuries and the shortening of careers have been linked to the infamous turf. It is no wonder that coaches do not want to see their young athletes playing on the treacherous turf.

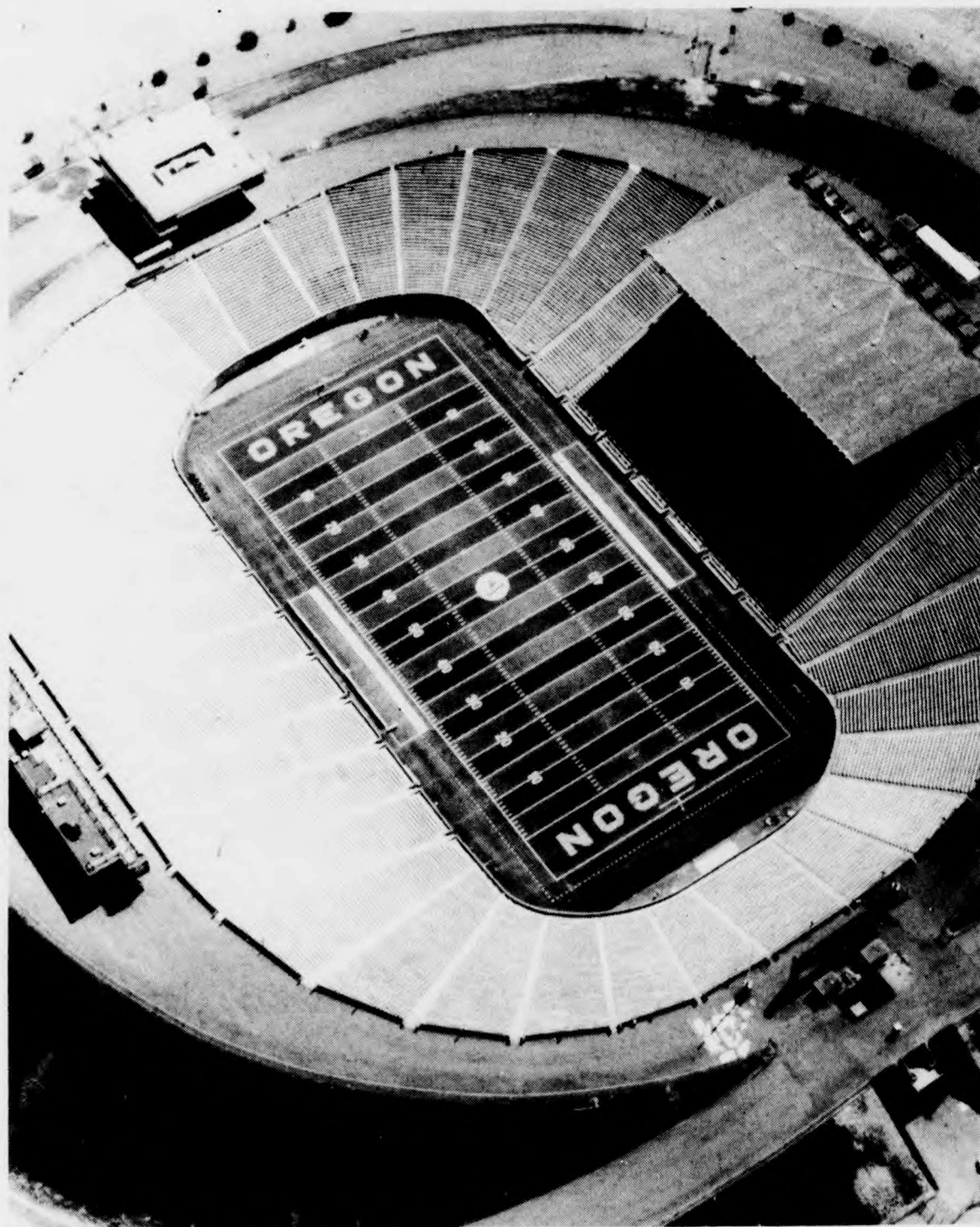
A solution to the artificial turf problem can be found in the revolutionary Canadian-made Omniurf. Manufactured by Omnisport International, a division of TecSyn Canada, the company's goal is to provide the sport world with a safer and more durable synthetic system.

Omnisport International, headquartered in St. Catharines, Ontario, is the leader in the design, manufacturing, and installation of the highly acclaimed Omniurf.

Omniurf was designed to overcome the major problems encountered with other artificial turf surfaces, while at the same time simulate the playing characteristics and appearance of a natural turf field in optimum condition. Omniurf's unique composition has proven to be a true all-weather sports surface, and a major contributor to the reduction of player injuries.

The Omniurf carpet boasts many unique characteristics, including one-inch fibers as compared to Astrourf's half-inch nylon fibers. This along with added granular sand between the fibers, serves as a better shock absorber and allows for better traction cutting down the number of injuries drastically.

Another feature is that all lines, crests and lettering on the field are permanently inlaid which eliminates



AN OVERHEAD VIEW: The University of Oregon sports stadium uses Omniurf.

painting that can make the fibers hard and slippery.

"In general, Omniurf is not that expensive," Canadian Sales Manager, Len Kimber, said. "In fact Omniurf costs 10 to 20 percent less than other artificial surfaces on the market."

Installation costs can range from \$300,000 to as high as \$750,000 for a 10,000 square foot field, depending upon base construction.

The maintenance of the Omniurf is minimal. With occasional brushing the Omniurf surface will remain in top condition for years. The surface is engineered to withstand the harshest of elements. It resists ultraviolet ray deterioration from the sun, which is one of the main causes of the wearing down of artificial turf. Rainfall is quickly absorbed from the surface and even a snow-fall, when removed, will not hamper playability.

In fact Omniurf is a better all-round playing surface than even natural grass, says Kimber. "As you continue to play on it, natural grass will deteriorate while Omniurf will resist the wear and tear of play," Kimber said. "Another plus for Omniurf is that it stands up to all weather while natural grass deteriorates in harsh weather and makes playing dangerous, similar to what you are experiencing at York."

Despite the seemingly excellent qualities of Omniurf, it has not gained acceptance in Canada. Omnisport's bid to resurface Exhibition stadium prior to the 1985 baseball season failed, losing out to the St. Louis-based Monsanto's Astro-

Turf, although Omnisport underbid Monsanto.

The main reason for the lack of success in the Canadian market is that, "Canadians are very slow in picking up on innovations developed here in Canada," Kimber said. "North America is a very hard market to break, that is why we needed to go to Europe to gain respect."

Omnisport has 40 installations of Omniurf in Europe including the Queen's Park Rangers field in London where they play soccer, rugby and field hockey on the Omniurf. There are also several fields in Holland and France. There is even an Omnicourt tennis court at Wimbledon and in Switzerland. Omnisport also has installations in Hong Kong, Japan and Australia, and

OmniGreens are featured at the Disney Land golf course.

Recently, in a North American breakthrough for the company, the Seattle Seahawks of the National Football League had a practice field covered in Omniurf. It is also the turf of preference at a number of universities in the United States, including Oregon, Missouri, Louisiana, James Madison and Buffalo, and all sing praises of the new Omniurf.

Head football coach at the University of Oregon, Rich Brooks said, "Omniurf is the closest to playing on natural grass than anything I have seen." Dick Bestwick, former Associate Athletic Director at the University of Missouri revealed that "we have experienced no turf related injuries and our players are most satisfied with the shock absorbency and footing Omniurf provides."

York's Athletic Director Norm Gledhill dismisses any chances of installing an artificial turf surface such as the Omniurf at York. "Due to budget constraints I see such an expense very unlikely," Gledhill said. "Also some sports are just not suited for artificial turf. Even if we were to consider installing an artificial surface there must be a complete feasibility study done first. But again I see this as being very unlikely."

York's field hockey coach Marina Van der Merwe, the only coach who would support a move to artificial turf, believes that "any coach at York who muddled through the muck this fall must in clear conscience feel the need for artificial turf. Our athletes strive for excellence but because of the poor fields, play becomes mediocre. It is obvious that we can no longer keep grass fields in good shape."

York spent \$18,000 last year on the maintenance of its four game fields. This includes irrigation, seeding, and mowing. This figure is bound to increase dramatically as the fields have suffered immense damage. Costs can only escalate and due to poor field design, it is probable this type of damage will occur next year unless something is done.

"It's a pity," Van der Merwe said, "that people with no sensitivity for sports are making the decisions for sports."

If York University is to remain a first rate University then some money must be spent to upgrade our deteriorating and cramped athletic facilities. Only an innovative approach by York's administration could turn this into a reality.

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