

As you may know, MV football is currently playing its season. Until March 27th, my team had already played on four turf fields: Randolph (almost 10 years old), Falmouth (brand new), Sandwich (6 years old), and Monomoy (6 years old). While I was on these fields, I had zero concerns about field conditions. All of my athletes and coaches were excited to compete on these surfaces.

After practice on Tuesday, March 23rd, I walked onto our game field to access its condition prior to our first home game. I was immediately appalled and disgusted. It is important to keep in mind that our game field has not had a competitive contest played on it since early November, 2019. In fact, other than a handful of co-ed soccer games last October, nobody has played on the game field for 15 of the last 16 months.

Our field conditions were so bad that I considered calling my AD and moving our home game back to an away game at Sandwich. I was not going to put my team, or the visiting team, on that surface in its current state. In response to the situation, I immediately called Caleb Nicholson, owner of Contemporary Landscape. With administrative permission, Caleb had his crew on the field the next morning. His crew was leaf blowing the thousands of piles of goose feces, filling in holes, and tamping down above ground mounds that voles had created. Even though the field was finished by Wednesday afternoon, it was once again saturated with goose feces for our game on Saturday.

Everyone needs to understand that our game field has extensive and expensive work performed on it every single summer. In fact, the game field is the only field nobody is allowed on from mid-June through the end of August. Mike Taus and his crew, often involving outside professionals, do the best job possible in repairing and preparing that field for the abuse and overuse for the upcoming school year. Even with their efforts, July and August are not the optimal grass growing months. One optimal grass growing season is early fall. During this time, there are three football teams and two soccer teams using the field. The other optimal grass growing season is in the spring. Similarly, there are four lacrosse teams using that field during this time.

Simply living on the island gives our athletes a disadvantage when it comes to summer league competition. Athletes living off-island have summer leagues, all-star leagues, and 7 on 7 leagues. Our Vineyard athletes can't participate in these leagues

due to boats, jobs, and expense. If we were to compete with those leagues, we would have to run summer camps and clinics on-island. Where can we hold these? What fields at the high school are available to us? We can't be on the game field, and we shouldn't be on our practice field either.

So I ask, where are we to conduct these summer workouts without destroying any existing fields? The only adequate answer would be to abuse the other fields at our school, setting them up for failure during the school year. I invite, and welcome, any and all to walk the practice field inside the track that we use for football. You will quickly notice that that field needs to be fenced off and condemned due to dangerous and unsafe conditions. But, if that happens, where are we to hold practice?

I will admit that I have only listened to one MVC meeting since the first one. I know there have been passionate presentations from both sides with various concerns, one of which is environmental. I give three examples of fields that we have either played on or visited: 1. Mass Maritime, with their turf field within 50 yards of the Bourne Canal; 2. Hull High School, with their turf field within 50 yards of the Atlantic Ocean; and 3. The Naval Academy, with their turf filed within 100 yards of the Chesapeake Bay. Two of these schools are known for their engineering and science. These field locations alone should quiet any remaining concerns regarding water contamination.

The second major concern highlights the fallacy that grass is sufficient and can be sustained on-island. Even if we had the grounds crew of the New England Patriots working here year round, nothing would change. Grass cannot support the workload our game field is asked to handle. Members of our community have suggested that our high school horticulture department could maintain the fields as part of the curriculum. Isn't it then ironic that several vocational schools, much larger than ours, have or are in the process of installing synthetic turf fields? These schools include: Cape Tech, Greater New Bedford Vocational, Bristol-Plymouth, Southeastern, and Blue Hills. If these schools have all the means to maintain grass fields, why are they installing synthetic turf?

Synthetic turf fields, numbering in the 1000's, have been around for decades. If there was a negative impact on the environment, or to player health and safety, this

would have been well-documented and well-publicized. The fact of the matter is that these new and improved synthetic turf fields continue to be installed all across our country and around the world.

In fact, a few private homes of the wealthy on the Vineyard have installed synthetic turf in the form of personal putting greens and tennis courts. I find it ironic and hypocritical that some of these surfaces exist in a town that voted ‘no’ for the high school synthetic turf field. Why are exceptions being made for those who have the luxury to install them on their private land?

Huntress is one of two firms that have researched field conditions and made recommendations. They install both grass and synthetic turf fields. If they are able to install and get paid for either surface, why is it they are so strongly recommending a synthetic turf field for us? Keep in mind, we are talking about just one field, not the entire complex..

I leave you with one final thought - Since the Covid-19 pandemic started, the popular catchphrase has been, “Listen to the experts and follow the science.” If you can take the emotion out of this... Follow the science. Listen to the experts. A free, synthetic turf is the solution.

Thank you,  
Donald Herman  
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