



If You Build It, They Will Come: Jack Trice Sod Project

Thomas Gould—research scientist, Department of Horticulture

Adam Thoms—assistant professor and extension turfgrass specialist, Department of Horticulture

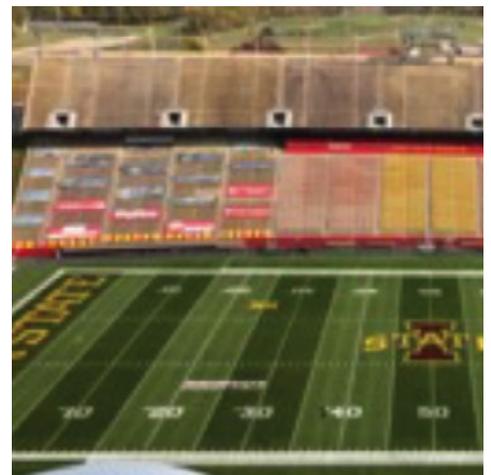
Iowa State University's Jack Trice Stadium has needed a field renovation for some time. The existing field was installed in 1997 and resodded in 2008. Over time, regular topdressing has increased the sand levels above the United States Golf Association (USGA) specified depth. This has caused some issues regarding water holding capacity (the profile drains too quickly) and the heightened frequency of 'hot spots' (creates a need for more frequent irrigation, which has resulted in shallow roots). To resolve root zone issues, a complete renovation was determined necessary in the fall of 2019.

Financial restraints from the effects of COVID-19 have affected everyone in Sports Field Management, and ISU was no exception. Prior to the 2020 football season, Jamie Pollard, ISU athletic director, projected a \$35 million deficit in the yearly budget for the athletics department. This shortfall caused the freezing of any non-essential purchases. The shortfall immediately postponed all plans for the field renovation until at least the spring of 2021. Due to successful limited fan attendance policies, and a successful football campaign, Pollard estimated the financial shortfall was only \$25 million, with plans to finance the debt for the next 10 to 15 years.

With the lessened financial shortfall, and the determination of the ISU Athletics Department to invest in facilities, the field renovation was allowed to proceed. The project began in April 2021, where 6 acres of cornfield was sand capped to grow Kentucky bluegrass sod to eventually resurface Jack Trice Stadium and the neighboring Johnny Majors practice field. The USGA spec sand sod will move to the Athletics Facilities in May 2022.



106 dump trucks with attached pumps were brought from Omaha, Nebraska, to provide a three-inch sand-cap to six acres of cornfield.



Iowa State University's Jack Trice Stadium on October 9, 2020. Photo taken prior to match-up with Texas Tech.

In-ground irrigation for the project was installed by the Meston Brothers in mid-April. Both the sub-grade of the cornfield and the final grade of the sand-cap was completed by the Iowa Sports Turf construction company. Iowa Sports Turf will coordinate and install the sod at completion of the project. Josh Tvrdik, director of turf and grounds for ISU Athletics, alongside Adam Thoms, assistant professor, have overseen big picture decisions. Day-to-day operations have been led by Thomas Gould, research scientist.

The sod was seeded with Mountain View Seed's 365SS Kentucky bluegrass blend. It is a blend of three different elite cultivars proven in the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) trials (see NTEP trial updates in this report). Some advantages to growing sod in-house are the ability to exactly match the sod's sand-base to the existing root zone, implement management of the turf to match those by the athletic department throughout the grow-in process, and management decisions will be aligned for optimal growing with attention to detail. Additionally, shipping costs of the sod are greatly reduced since shipping distance is minimal.

The sod will be transplanted in May, with hopes of the turf being ready for the 2022 football season. This project has been an excellent learning opportunity for the turfgrass students in the Iowa State University Horticulture Turfgrass option.

