

Faux Grass

Artificial turf will take mud out of The Swamp

LOUISIANA'S RAGIN' CAJUNS® WILL have already defeated one powerful opponent – Mother Nature – by the time they play their first home game on Sept. 20.

Installation of artificial turf this summer will take away her ability to affect Cajun Field's playing surface.

Scott Farmer, UL Lafayette's senior associate athletic director, said switching from natural grass to artificial grass will ensure that the gridiron remains in optimum shape and always looks its best. "This field will become a showcase for our university, for our Athletic Department," he said.

Farmer ranks the artificial turf as the second most important athletic facility improvement at UL Lafayette in recent years. The first, he said, was construction of the huge Leon Moncla Indoor Practice Facility, which opened in Fall 2007. It enables all Ragin' Cajun teams to stay dry and safe when they must practice during inclement weather.

"There's no doubt that the No. 1 strength in the Athletic Department today is the indoor practice facility because no one else in the Sun Belt Conference has that. It sets us apart," Farmer said.

He offered several ways artificial turf at Cajun Field will benefit the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

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IT'S CHEAPER

Maintaining a natural surface requires equipment, supplies and labor. For instance, crews use gasoline-powered lawnmowers and string trimmers. Water, weed



Scott Farmer, senior associate athletic director at UL Lafayette, shows off a new generation of artificial turf to be installed at Cajun Field.



I line up my kick with where I want it to go, taking into consideration wind, rain and field conditions.

(Editor's note: La Louisiane asked Drew Edmiston, Louisiana's Ragin' Cajuns® kicker, how he expects artificial turf at Cajun Field to affect his kick and to describe what's needed for a successful field goal. A senior, he has made 21 career field goals.)

THE SWAMP" HAS ALWAYS BEEN my favorite place to play. Maybe it's the uniqueness of competing on a field that's two feet below sea level. Or maybe it's the excitement of hearing the echoes of teammates yelling and cleats clacking as we walk down the long, dark tunnel to the field. Either way, once a Cajun plays in the Swamp, anywhere else just isn't home.

When I heard of the switch to artifi-

killers and fertilizer are needed to keep grass healthy. Paint is used for stripes and logos on the field.

The new field will cost about \$700,000. It is expected to have a 10-year life, with minimal maintenance costs.

“When you add up all the costs associated with a natural grass playing field, it’s more economical to put in artificial turf,” Farmer said.

LOUISIANA’S RAGIN’ CAJUNS® WILL GAIN ANOTHER PRACTICE FIELD

There’s already an outdoor practice field next to the Alfred and Helen Lamson Ragin’ Cajun Softball Park. When it rains, the football team heads for the Leon Moncla Indoor Practice Facility. “But when we put 120 guys on that field at one time, it

gets crowded in a hurry,” Farmer said. Depending on the season, rains can be brief. The artificial turf will be ready for practice as soon as rain ends. Cajun Field’s proximity to the newly renovated weight room in the Cox Communications Athletic Center is a plus; it’s convenient for strength coaches to use to condition student-athletes.

CAJUN FIELD CAN BE USED FOR MORE THAN FOOTBALL

To make sure the natural grass surface stayed in the best condition possible, the Athletic Department rarely granted requests by other teams or organizations to use Cajun Field during football season. The artificial surface, Farmer said, “will enable us to say ‘Yes’ more often.” For example, UL Lafayette’s Pride of Acadiana

Marching Band could use it for practices on occasion. Events such as Kiwanis Jamboree, an area high school football tournament, could be held at Cajun Field without the risk of damaging the playing field.

‘IT’S AN IMAGE THING’

“This field will look great every day of the year. It’s something that our coaches can use to recruit every day,” Farmer said.

Recruitment is the lifeblood of collegiate athletics, he explained.

The new field will also make a positive impression on potential students – not just student-athletes – and on potential donors and athletic event sponsors, he continued.

“It’s an image thing. It will help strengthen the image of our Athletic Department.”

IT TAKES A TEAM TO SCORE A FIELD GOAL • BY DREW EDMISTON



BRAD KEMP

Before every kick, I look up, picture the ball going through the uprights, take a deep breath, then nod to the holder to tell him I’m ready.



BRAD KEMP

This is the most important part of my kick. A good plant into the ground with my left foot keeps me balanced and directs where the ball will go.



BRAD KEMP

My head is down and I kick the ball at a steep angle to get the lift and distance it needs. My goal is to, after a second or two, look up and see the ball right where I pictured it.

cial turf, I was excited. I have practiced a lot in the Leon Moncla Indoor Practice Facility, which has artificial turf, as did my alma mater, Owasso High School in Owasso, Okla. It is a great surface to play on and it helps me out a lot at my position. I will be able to kick without worrying so much about sticking my “plant foot” firmly into the ground without it slipping out from underneath me mid-kick due to bad field conditions.

As much as I love Cajun Field, a little bit of rain can turn it into a mud pit, even with its underground drainage system. About two hours before every game, I have walked the field, scoping out all the hazards and planning how I would approach a kick if the ball happened to be placed in a little bayou on the field. Since the artificial turf will be more consistent, I could almost

do away with my pre-game field check ritual, but I’ll probably still do it out of habit.

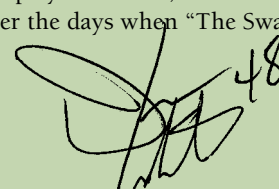
The condition of the field and foot placement are important, but there is a lot more involved in the success of a field goal. It’s my name that is printed in the newspaper after a game winner, but a kicker’s success depends a lot on efforts from other team members.

Once the offense has gotten the ball in field goal range, the coach can elect to go for a field goal. There has to be great protection from the line blocking the opposing team. A small miscue there can result in a blocked kick and turnover, which ultimately could mean points for the other team.

There has to be a good snap to the holder so that he can make a good hold. Even a small variation in the way the ball is

placed for the kick can send it in the wrong direction. Any kicker will tell you that the hold can make or break you, so there has to be a lot of trust and confidence between holder and kicker. The last part of an effective field goal is the kick.

Thankfully, I have been blessed in my kicking career with always having a group of guys that I can count on whenever I’m called onto the field. The new artificial turf will relieve some nerves for me and will have many benefits for some of our other players as well, but we will all remember the days when “The Swamp” truly was a swamp. ■



ARTIFICIAL TURF PROVIDES A CONSISTENT PLAYING SURFACE

“Student-athletes are looking for consistency and that’s what it will provide,” Farmer said. There’s a natural tendency for a student-athlete to be tentative if he doesn’t know whether his feet will slip while making a play, for example. “And usually, in athletics, when you’re tentative, bad things can happen. That’s when you get hit and you get hurt. This artificial turf will give them a little piece of mind.”

ARTIFICIAL TURF HAS COME A LONG WAY IN THE PAST DECADE

The principle remains the same as when it was introduced in the 1960s: plastic fibers that look like blades of grass are attached to a backing. Instead of dirt, a synthetic material is used to form a cushion.

But the filler between the plastic fibers has improved dramatically, Farmer said. In the past, it was often made of rubber tires that had been ground into tiny pieces.

The artificial turf at Cajun Field will be cushioned by sand granules coated in silicon dioxide to make them round. “The importance of it being round is that it doesn’t compact,” Farmer said.

The light-color granules don’t absorb as much of the sun’s heat as black rubber fill material. And, moisture filters through the coated particles – and runs into an underground drainage system – faster than it filters through dirt. That means less humidity on the field.

Early artificial turf was blamed for some serious injuries suffered by football players. “The bad knee injuries, and sometimes the bad lower leg injuries, came from when your foot got locked down in the artificial turf and your body was still trying to move. Your cleats would dig in and that’s when you would really hurt your knee or leg. I don’t think there’s ever been a documented case where a person’s foot got locked into this surface. That’s because part of the artificial turf is sand and



Cajun Field’s playing surface will require minimal maintenance to stay in top condition.

sand will give,” Farmer said.

The early artificial turf also caused skin abrasions. “Literally, they were carpet burns. This new material does not cause burns,” he noted.

Installation of the artificial turf at Cajun Field will take about 90 days. Farmer explained what will happen:

“The current field, like most natural grass fields, has a crown on it. That means the center of the field is about 18 inches higher than the two sidelines. That mound is pretty significant but that’s what helps it to drain. The field for the artificial turf will only have about a 4-inch crown.

“So first, the installers will remove the sod. Then they will remove the area down the center part of the field to bring that crown down. We are going to use that dirt, by the way, to build up our

outdoor practice field, to build a larger crown on it so it drains better.”

The sand-like material will be spread and covered with a mat. At the same time, installers will link the new surface to an existing drainage system. An eight-foot cement pad will be poured around the field.

“That pad serves several purposes. For example, water drains down a football stadium, unfortunately, and it all ends up on the field. This cement pad will have drains in it. So when the water comes down, bringing peanut shells, popcorn and sunflower seeds from the seating area, it will have a place to go and not just dump on the field.

“It will enable us to park carts by the field. And, it’s also where you connect the artificial turf.”

The only maintenance required

is to lightly vacuum the artificial turf to remove any debris.

Cajun Field’s nickname is “The Swamp,” primarily because the gridiron is two feet below sea level. A sophisticated underground drainage system has kept the grass field in playing condition, even during rainstorms.

Farmer said the manufacturer of the artificial turf claims that it can drain about four inches of rain an hour.

“If it rains any more than that, we’re not going to have anyone in the stands anyway,” he joked. ■

2008 LOUISIANA’S RAGIN’ CAJUNS® FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Southern Miss	Hattiesburg, Miss.	TBA
Sept. 13	Illinois	Champaign, Ill.	TBA
SEPT. 20	KENT STATE	CAJUN FIELD	6 p.m.
	8th Annual Herbert Heymann Football Classic		
Sept. 27	Kansas State	Manhattan, Kan.	TBA
Oct. 4	Louisiana-Monroe*	Monroe, La.	TBA
Oct. 11	North Texas*	Denton, Texas	TBA
OCT. 18	ARKANSAS STATE*	CAJUN FIELD	6 p.m.
NOV. 1	FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL*	CAJUN FIELD	4 p.m.
	63rd Homecoming		
NOV. 8	UT AT EL PASO	CAJUN FIELD	TBA
Nov. 15	Florida Atlantic*	Boca Raton, Fla.	3 p.m.
Nov. 22	Troy*	Troy, Ala.	TBA
DEC. 3	MIDDLE TENNESSEE*	CAJUN FIELD	TBA

* Sun Belt Conference Games