An aerial photograph of a sports field. In the foreground, a blue athletic track with white lane markings and yellow directional arrows curves across the frame. The track lanes are numbered 2 through 7. To the right, a large, semi-circular area of reddish-brown dirt, likely an infield for baseball or softball, is visible. The rest of the field is covered in green artificial turf. A white soccer goal is positioned on the right side of the field. In the lower-left quadrant, there is a circular structure, possibly a well or a utility access point, surrounded by a metal frame and scaffolding. Yellow lines are drawn on the turf, possibly indicating field boundaries or construction zones.

INSTALLING OR RENOVATING CAMPUS ATHLETIC TRACKS

by Shawn Taylor

You may be looking to install a new track and field surface or renovate your existing athletic track, but you may be unsure of where to start and what factors to consider. When you consider the advancements in the sports surfacing industry over the past 30 years, the first step can be daunting.



It wasn't too long ago that the great athletes in track and field were competing on crushed stone and cinder tracks. However in the 1970's synthetic track and field surfaces started to differentiate themselves and, since then, the two dominant forms of track and field surfaces have been rubber sheet goods and polyurethane athletic tracks. The question remains, "Which system is right for you and what should you consider when installing a new track and field surface?"

Choosing the Best Surface for Your Campus Track

If you have an existing surface, you should bring in experts to determine if you can renovate your current track. If the subbase is still in good condition you may be able to resurface it for a fraction of the cost of installing a brand new track.

However, if your current surface is not in good enough condition to be resurfaced, you should consider which new track and field surface is best for your campus. Partnering with a qualified contractor and preparing a list

of design requirements can avoid unnecessary costs. Additionally, this exercise can help you plan and understand the timeline or potential scheduling conflicts with construction. For example, if your track surrounds a football field, you should plan the installation during football's offseason or have the football team practice and play elsewhere while the track and field surface is being installed.

If your athletic track surrounds a field that is used for concerts, pep rallies, etc., the type of track and field surface can play a significant role in the lifecycle. If you expect there to be vehicular use on the track, having a surface with glued seams can lead to premature wearing of the surface and seam separation, even with precautions taken.

Climatic conditions can also affect the performance and longevity of your track surface. Certain track systems have been known to harden significantly with age as plasticizers are released over time resulting in delamination, seam separation, and potential injury to athletes.

Noting Intended Use: NCAA/IAAF Sanctioned Meets

Additionally, the intended use of your track can impact the type of surface you will install. If you are planning to use your track and field surface for NCAA or IAAF competitions, for instance, you will want to go with one of the elite brands of the various manufacturers. You will generally pay slightly more for these elite systems, but on average they use superior materials and have a longer lifecycle.

Alternatively, if you are simply looking for a synthetic track system to replace a track that is currently deteriorated with no intentions of using it for NCAA or IAAF sanctioned meets, you could save some money and select a more economical track system. Just because it is not as expensive as the other track surfaces in the elite categories does not mean it will not meet all of your needs.

One trick to look out for is to see if the economic system you are considering is IAAF certified. The IAAF certification means that the particular track system has been tested by the IAAF and has passed all of their performance standards.

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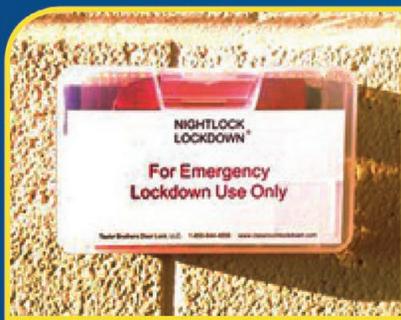
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The Next Step

Now that you've determined what type of track surface is right for you, the next step is to choose a manufacturer of the track and field surface. With so many options available, selecting a track supplier can also be a challenging task. Before deciding, consider the following questions:

1. What types of institutions have utilized the track surfacing manufacturer in the past?
2. How many installations of the proposed system has the track surfacing company installed?
3. What is the quality of the products that go into the surface?
4. Are the track surfaces manufactured domestically and on a per job basis?
5. What type of warranty is offered, and what type of maintenance is required?
6. What is the financial stability of the manufacturer—will they be there to service the facility?

7. What are the total lifecycle costs—what does it cost to own the athletic track?

- a. Installation costs
- b. Maintenance costs
- c. Life expectancy and cost to replace

Finding the Right Partner

When looking for a company, you want to ensure that they have installed similar track and field surfaces in your region or in regions that have similar climatic conditions. Anything ranging from high humidity to cold weather can affect how an athletic track is installed or the timeframe for the installation.

Poor workmanship, sub-par materials and improper maintenance can lead to the following safety concerns: seam separation, delamination, product color fading, hardening of the surface, and potential injury to athletes. For example, a rubber sheet good product has over five miles of glued seams in an eight-lane track, which if installed improperly or with inferior materials can lead to a surface with a short lifespan and seams that could separate and become a tripping hazard for your athletes.

On the other hand, polyurethane track and field surfaces are seamless and resilient by formulation, so they will not harden with age. Of course, that doesn't mean all polyurethane surfaces are the perfect solution either, and all full pour polyurethane systems are not created equal. The performance and customization of a full pour polyurethane track and field system is directly correlated to the quality and quantity of two-component polyurethane utilized in the system. Many companies fill their track and field surfaces with inexpensive and low performance SBR aggregate; while it does lower the cost of the system, it also reduces the performance and longevity. If you are looking for a track and field surface that can be used for NCAA/IAAF sanctioned meets and will have an extended lifecycle in the immediate and long-term future, those products may not be the best choice for your particular needs.

While all-weather running tracks are designed to reduce the risk of injuries while maximizing performance, the following items are integral to ensuring the surface remains safe: proper maintenance, experienced installation personnel, and the highest level of workmanship.

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Environmental and Budgetary Parameters

Another important factor to consider is the environmental parameters that the track and field surfacing company adheres to. You want to make sure the track surfacing company does not use heavy metals in their formulation. Some companies also have harmful solvents in their sprays that are not only harmful to the environment but also to the installers.

Environmentally-conscious manufacturers will have products and installation methods that count towards LEED credits by being actively involved with organizations such as these listed below:

- USGBC (US Green Building Council)
- ASTM (American Standard Testing Methods) International
- FSCT (Federal Society of Coatings Technology)
- ACS (American Chemical Society)
- SPE (Society of Plastic Engineers)

Let's not forget one of the most important items to consider: budget. You want to look for a company that has multiple surfacing options, experience with each of those options and one that will work with you to make sure you are getting the best possible option for what you can afford. You also want to look at the type of warranty that is offered: Is it backed by a 3rd party insured warranty, and what are the yearly aggregate and per claim limits?

Maintenance Guidelines

Now that you've selected your track and field surface and manufacturer, start to enjoy some of the benefits that come with the installation of a new or resurfaced synthetic track.

To ensure that the benefits of the new track and field surface continue to last, it is important to follow the maintenance guidelines set forth by your track surfacing company. Listed below are a few general tips on maintaining your surface:

- Limit vehicular traffic to only light-weight maintenance equipment and mowers.
 - Ensure there are no fluids leaking from the vehicles

- Keep the mower at its highest level when crossing the track
- Do not turn your wheels without the vehicle in motion
- Install protective mats over areas that have a high traffic flow
- Try to rotate the high traffic flow areas
- Clean the track once a year with a pressure washer that does not exceed 1,200psi
- Use a neutral cleaner to wipe up any spills
- Do not use a broom or brush, use a blower and/or hose

In closing, never be afraid to ask questions from the track and field manufacturer—this is a significant purchase and you want to be comfortable with your selections.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Shawn Taylor

works for Beynon Sports which has been revolutionizing the track industry since 2001.

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