

# Profile® *Field & Fairway*™ is Key for *MLS is Back* Tournament and Maryland SoccerPlex



## PROJECT SUMMARY

- Wide World of Sports Complex, Walt Disney World Resort, Orlando, Florida
- Maryland SoccerPlex, Boyds, Maryland

## PROJECT STAKEHOLDERS

Jerad Minnick, Director of Grounds for Maryland SoccerPlex and Founder of the Natural Grass Advisory Group

## PRODUCTS USED

Profile® *Field & Fairway*™

## BACKGROUND

Soccer is tough on grass, which is one reason many groundskeepers struggle to maintain their soccer pitches throughout the season. As fields experience compaction from heavy foot traffic and waterlogging from rain, many groundskeepers are tempted to switch to artificial turf or use large amounts of sand to maintain their grass fields. But there is a better long-term solution.

Jerad Minnick, director of grounds for Maryland SoccerPlex and founder of the Natural Grass Advisory Group™, has shown time after time that using data science and Profile® Products' groundbreaking *Field & Fairway*™ has been a game changer for fields across the country and for every level of play, from youth to Major League Soccer competitions. Healthier, more durable turf was just the beginning, as using *Field & Fairway*™ led to more games, more tournaments and a higher ROI over time.

*Field & Fairway*™ is an inorganic ceramic particle that can be incorporated into native soil root zones. It has 74% internal pore space, helping it resist compaction in heavy traffic areas, manage moisture and promote healthy root systems.

Through his involvement with the Natural Grass Advisory Group™, Minnick opted to use *Field & Fairway*™ for a site he regularly manages, the Maryland SoccerPlex in Boyds, Maryland. He then applied data insights and lessons learned from that location to the 2020 "MLS is Back" Tournament in Florida, the largest single-site professional soccer event ever held, with 51 matches on three fields over 35 days.



***"SoccerPlex is a nonprofit, so we're not spending even a fraction of what professional facilities spend per field, but we're doing our applications and things targeted to our high traffic areas differently to make our money go further."***



MLS is Back Tournament



Maryland SoccerPlex

## CHALLENGES

Grass fields require regular maintenance, and yet across much of the country, they become neglected. Consequently, some athletes spend years, from childhood through high school and college, playing on neglected, unsafe surfaces with inconsistent and compacted turf. To create more consistent playing surfaces and help players avoid injuries, groundskeepers have to manage turf through high levels of wear and tear without being able to do intensive maintenance between matches.

Using a system of AI sensors to create a heat map of player traffic, Minnick and his team found that fields wear down unevenly. Roughly 50% of the field experiences 70% of traffic, with the center, edges and areas in front of the goals experiencing more compaction and deformation than other areas. Most groundskeepers don't have visibility into this issue and, consequently, implement less effective, one-size-fits-all solutions to their fields.

Groundskeepers need a solution that not only boosts their fields' durability season after season, but one that can be periodically prescribed to more worn areas of the field to ensure overall field consistency game after game.

## THE SOLUTION

Minnick discovered that a more effective solution for maintaining his soccer fields was Profile Products' *Field & Fairway*™, and early on he employed solutions built around *Field & Fairway*™ when he was put in charge of field improvements at the Maryland SoccerPlex. The SoccerPlex hosts a variety of games and tournaments day after day throughout the year, from youth to professional level matches. Each field averages 10 matches a week.

Minnick's AI analysis showed typical, uneven wear patterns on the fields; however protecting the middle 30,000 square feet of pitch was even more critical due to more youth matches, because kids tend to crowd the middle of the field and the areas in front of the goals. Because of the regularity of games, Minnick's team chose to topdress with *Field & Fairway*™ providing the extra benefit of providing more complete turf coverage and protecting the turf from more surface compaction. "You don't have to do any extra work to topdress Profile and walk away," said Minnick.

Minnick and his team applied a similar approach at the MLS is Back tournament, learning from their successes in Maryland. Two weeks before the first game in the MLS is Back tournament, Minnick's team used DryJect to apply *Field & Fairway*™ to the fields' 50,000 square feet of highest trafficked areas. DryJect uses a high-speed, water-based injection system to blast aeration holes through the root zone and then fills fractures in the soil with amendments with a vacuum system. *Field & Fairway*™ is ideal as an amendment thanks to its medium particle size, as well as its water- and nutrient-holding capabilities. It boosts oxygen levels in the root zone and facilitates drainage.



DryJect at MLS is Back Tournament



Topdressing at Maryland SoccerPlex

## RESULTS

At both the Maryland SoccerPlex and the MLS is Back tournament, the results have spoken for themselves. At the latter, using *Field & Fairway*™ resulted in average field compaction decreasing from 14 millimeters to 8.7 millimeters. It also improved grass rooting thanks to consistent porosity that doesn't clog as readily as sand, as well as improved drainage through the grass's organic layer by 10% (which was critical with Florida's near daily rainstorms).

"With *Field & Fairway*™ you're making a capital investment that is going to continue to give you returns for the next 8, 10, 12, 15 years," said Minnick. "So it's something that we think highly of because of that. And it really showed during this event, more than it ever had, really."

Perhaps the biggest accolade for the ground crews was the fact they didn't receive any complaints from players or coaches. Professional players are especially particular about field consistency, so this was a major win for Minnick and his team.

Similar benefits continue to be seen at the Maryland SoccerPlex since Minnick's strategies were implemented. Topdressing with *Field & Fairway*™ diluted concentrated thatch, improved turf recovery, improved the grass's rootzone and increased overall firmness. Mitigating compaction, especially in the middle of the field where the highest traffic occurs, is critical at the Maryland SoccerPlex. Minnick's team realized *Field & Fairway*™ provided long-term benefits without requiring constant attention throughout the year. Even applying two to three times a year yielded substantial long-term improvements to drainage, compaction resistance and overall durability.

*Field & Fairway*™, combined with smart data analysis and maintenance strategies, enabled Maryland SoccerPlex to handle more matches with fewer interruptions for field maintenance. Games can keep going nearly nonstop, with everything from weekly soccer clubs to seasonal tournaments to additional sports like lacrosse drawing in people from across the state and country to the local community.



***"Even though using *Field & Fairway*™ is a bigger investment, it's nothing compared to a million dollar synthetic system. It's an investment that's going to last at least 10 years. So when you prorate it over 10 years, it's going to pay for itself."***

"With *Field & Fairway*™, you know what results you're going to get. You're going to get a quality product. You're going to get a consistent product, and you're going to get consistent results. So, I was pleased as I could be. And it really did make a difference. It made a significant difference," Minnick concluded.