

**Real Turf vs. Fake Turf**

**What is Better for Sports, Real or Fake Turf?**

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## **What is Better for Sports, Real or Fake Turf?**

Have you ever played sports or even watched them as you view players getting injured left, and right? Well, this could be due to many reasons, but one of the most popular ones being talked about now is grass type, and lots of people prefer different ones. Most say real grass, but some say fake grass, so which one is best overall for any situation? Lots of sports fans are beginning to protest for turf changes, as injury rates for players are becoming higher and higher. Some say that it is because of the lack of protection in padding, lack of proper injury treatment, and some even say that it's because of the negligence of the player. However, the main issue that I have researched and concluded is the type of turf. Some people believe that artificial turf is safer, and more reliable in certain situations. Others say that the fake grass provides benefits to the sporting experience and that it is cheaper. Well, primarily all these claims are false about artificial turf, for one it is not safer, not the best for experience, and it provides more expensive installation. Although some of these claims can be reasonable, the negatives to these claims dramatically outweigh the benefits. Real turf is truly much more beneficial than fake turf, as real turf is preferred for players, coaches, and referees.

Most overlook some of the most important reasons for choosing a specific material, but the most important I would say is safety and risk. Safety is what it comes down to as injuries could decide the overall cost for not just the organization, but for that player's medical costs. It is either to pay more to keep your athletes safer and happier or pay less to reduce costs and leave your athletes at risk. In the article, "For Better Health, Safety of Athletes Which Playing Surface Is Best?" by Dustin Pare (2019) from *Global Sport Matters* states, "One study showed playing on synthetic turf in the NFL resulted in a 16% increase in lower body injuries compared to the same injuries on natural grass. These results were from the 2012-2016 seasons, during which all injuries in the lower extremities (foot, knee and ankle). The study concluded synthetic turf does

have an impact on injuries to lower body parts in NFL players.” I can relate to this, as even walking on the two can supply huge differences, and I have had my few shares of burns on my feet from artificial turf. All in all, injuries occur more often in the NFL on artificial turf than on grass, displaying why it is worth the maintenance for real grass.

There are a lot of different views and opinions that arise from this topic, but what do the players think and what do I believe? Some players say that AT (artificial turf) is more fun to play on, and that it feels better to run on. Other players say that NT (natural turf) is better because of the benefits with safety, and that it overall is better to play on for experience. They also mention that NT absorbs impact better than AT, and that NT provides better give to movements, allowing players to maneuver without worry. When it comes to comparing these two views, I believe one stands above the other, and that is NT. In my opinion, natural turf overall is better in general, and the reasons can be proven to be more beneficial and preferable to most athletes as well. In several surveys ran by the *NFLPA* in 2010, the “2010 NFL PLAYERS LAYING SURFACES OPINION SURVEY” showed that 69.4% of the players said that they preferred natural turf over artificial turf. And another one of the surveys that was conducted by the NFL in the opinion survey displayed that 82.4% of players believed that artificial turf is more likely to contribute to injury than natural turf. It is obvious that players would rather play on NT, and it is safer, so why do people and organizations still decide to use AT?

Figure 1: NFL Players Playing Surfaces Opinion Survey (*NFLPA*, 2010)

| 9.) What type of field do you prefer to play on? |              |              |                     |              |               |             |             |             |                |
|--|--------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| CLUB   | GRASS        |              | ARTIFICIAL INFILLED |              | NO PREFERENCE |             | NA          |             | TOTAL ANSWERED |
| ARIZONA CARDINALS                                | 47           | 82.5%        | 4                   | 7.0%         | 3             | 5.3%        | 3           | 5.26%       | 57             |
| ATLANTA FALCONS                                  | 34           | 72.3%        | 7                   | 14.9%        | 5             | 10.6%       | 1           | 2.13%       | 47             |
| BALTIMORE RAVENS                                 | 21           | 55.3%        | 4                   | 10.5%        | 5             | 13.2%       | 8           | 21.05%      | 38             |
| BUFFALO BILLS                                    | 22           | 44.9%        | 14                  | 28.6%        | 9             | 18.4%       | 4           | 8.16%       | 49             |
| CAROLINA PANTHERS                                | 44           | 73.3%        | 8                   | 13.3%        | 6             | 10.0%       | 2           | 3.33%       | 60             |
| CHICAGO BEARS                                    | 29           | 74.4%        | 2                   | 5.1%         | 6             | 15.4%       | 2           | 5.13%       | 39             |
| CINCINNATI BENGALS                               | 28           | 59.6%        | 10                  | 21.3%        | 6             | 12.8%       | 3           | 6.38%       | 47             |
| CLEVELAND BROWNS                                 | 31           | 59.6%        | 13                  | 25.0%        | 3             | 5.8%        | 5           | 9.62%       | 52             |
| DALLAS COWBOYS                                   | 21           | 61.8%        | 6                   | 17.6%        | 2             | 5.9%        | 5           | 14.71%      | 34             |
| DENVER BRONCOS                                   | 39           | 84.8%        | 1                   | 2.2%         | 1             | 2.2%        | 5           | 10.87%      | 46             |
| DETROIT LIONS                                    | 31           | 52.5%        | 13                  | 22.0%        | 3             | 5.1%        | 12          | 20.34%      | 59             |
| GREEN BAY PACKERS                                | 40           | 72.7%        | 6                   | 10.9%        | 4             | 7.3%        | 5           | 9.09%       | 55             |
| HOUSTON TEXANS                                   | 54           | 81.8%        | 8                   | 12.1%        | 4             | 6.1%        | 0           | 0.00%       | 66             |
| INDIANAPOLIS COLTS                               | 35           | 70.0%        | 6                   | 12.0%        | 6             | 12.0%       | 3           | 6.00%       | 50             |
| JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS                             | 38           | 79.2%        | 5                   | 10.4%        | 0             | 0.0%        | 5           | 10.42%      | 48             |
| KANSAS CITY CHIEFS                               | 40           | 69.0%        | 2                   | 3.4%         | 4             | 6.9%        | 12          | 20.69%      | 58             |
| MIAMI DOLPHINS                                   | 48           | 78.7%        | 3                   | 4.9%         | 8             | 13.1%       | 2           | 3.28%       | 61             |
| MINNESOTA VIKINGS                                | 35           | 68.6%        | 10                  | 19.6%        | 3             | 5.9%        | 3           | 5.88%       | 51             |
| NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS                             | 37           | 60.7%        | 14                  | 23.0%        | 8             | 13.1%       | 2           | 3.28%       | 61             |
| NEW ORLEANS SAINTS                               | 23           | 42.6%        | 19                  | 35.2%        | 11            | 20.4%       | 1           | 1.85%       | 54             |
| NEW YORK GIANTS                                  | 36           | 67.9%        | 7                   | 13.2%        | 3             | 5.7%        | 7           | 13.21%      | 53             |
| NEW YORK JETS                                    | 30           | 60.0%        | 7                   | 14.0%        | 9             | 18.0%       | 4           | 8.00%       | 50             |
| OAKLAND RAIDERS                                  | 18           | 72.0%        | 3                   | 12.0%        | 3             | 12.0%       | 1           | 4.00%       | 25             |
| PHILADELPHIA EAGLES                              | 31           | 79.5%        | 4                   | 10.3%        | 2             | 5.1%        | 2           | 5.13%       | 39             |
| PITTSBURGH STEELERS                              | 47           | 82.5%        | 4                   | 7.0%         | 4             | 7.0%        | 2           | 3.51%       | 57             |
| SAN DIEGO CHARGERS                               | 46           | 82.1%        | 5                   | 8.9%         | 2             | 3.6%        | 3           | 5.36%       | 56             |
| SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS                              | 32           | 71.1%        | 7                   | 15.6%        | 5             | 11.1%       | 1           | 2.22%       | 45             |
| SEATTLE SEAHAWKS                                 | 30           | 56.6%        | 11                  | 20.8%        | 9             | 17.0%       | 3           | 5.66%       | 53             |
| ST. LOUIS RAMS                                   | 39           | 72.2%        | 10                  | 18.5%        | 4             | 7.4%        | 1           | 1.85%       | 54             |
| TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS                             | 33           | 71.7%        | 8                   | 17.4%        | 2             | 4.3%        | 3           | 6.52%       | 46             |
| TENNESSEE TITANS                                 | 55           | 90.2%        | 6                   | 9.8%         | 0             | 0.0%        | 0           | 0.00%       | 61             |
| WASHINGTON REDSKINS                              | 34           | 70.8%        | 5                   | 10.4%        | 4             | 8.3%        | 5           | 10.42%      | 48             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                     | <b>1128</b>  |              | <b>232</b>          |              | <b>144</b>    |             | <b>115</b>  |             | <b>1619</b>    |
| <b>AVERAGE</b>                                   | <b>35.25</b> | <b>69.4%</b> | <b>7.25</b>         | <b>14.3%</b> | <b>4.50</b>   | <b>9.0%</b> | <b>3.59</b> | <b>7.3%</b> | <b>50.59</b>   |

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Now another example of why people choose AT over NT is overall maintenance and durability. The artificial turf is freeze resistant, and doesn't require the need for mowing, fertilizer, water, or cleaning like NT needs. While these statements are true about artificial turf, they fail to include the health of not just the players, but the environment and nature. In Lizzy Rosenberg's (2022) article "The Environmental Pros and Cons of Covering Your Yard with Fake Grass", Rosenberg (2022) states:

While fake grass would seem to be the way to go for lowering your impact, it's far from it. According to *The Guardian*, people often rip out and destroy their already-healthy lawns, plants, and gardens to replace it with plastic grass. This not only decimates anything that could naturally sequester carbon, but the artificial grass is also plastic, derived from oil and coal—and it can't be efficiently recycled. Artificial grass, being

plastic, also retains heat and doesn't give the same cooling effect as a natural green space. They need to be hosed down to stay cool enough not to burn dogs or other animals, and they require cleaning products to rid them of odors and stains. The rubber beneath the plastic strands of grass is also toxic and difficult to recycle. And of course, it doesn't serve the same purpose to pollinators that natural vegetation does, contributing to biodiversity decline.

The article elaborates on how natural grass can provide benefits in vegetation and survival of healthy lawns. Rosenberg (2022) also replies why artificial grass is bad for natural vegetation and how it contributes to biodiversity decline unlike some believe. I completely agree with these statements, as in reasoning, artificial grass simply isn't as good for the environment as natural grass is, providing more insight into NT is better.

Although artificial grass can be used in other areas other than sports, I do believe it should have never been implemented in the sporting industry. One thing people forget to mention when supplying the benefits of AT are the infections that arrive from the turf. Players have increased rates of getting infections and burns from playing on artificial turf as opposed to grass. In the article "Artificial Turf Fields: Health and Environmental Concerns" from *Green Building Alliance* (2022), guest contributors said "Increased rates of skin abrasions (turf burns) have been associated with playing on artificial turf. These skin abrasions, in turn, are a risk factor for serious bacterial infections. A study by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment found a two- to three-fold increase in skin abrasions per player hour on artificial turf compared with natural grass turf. Studies have implicated artificial turf as a source of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in athletes. MRSA infections are a substantial and growing source of concern for athletes' health." The article supplies information on the injuries that can occur from artificial turf, it also includes the assessments of the injuries

and how severe they can be compared to the average injuries on natural turf. The assessments and data provided by the Green Building Alliance allow better clarity and clearance on why natural turf is safer than artificial turf.

Even though many of these injuries people talk about in artificial turf are on-contact injuries, this doesn't mean that non-contact injuries occur as well on artificial turf. In the article "Only Natural Grass Can Level The NFL's Playing Field" by J.C. Tretter from the *NFLPA*, states "Based on NFL injury data collected from 2012 to 2018, not only was the contact injury rate for lower extremities higher during practices and games held on artificial turf, NFL players consistently experienced a much higher rate of non-contact lower extremity injuries on turf compared to natural surfaces. Specifically, players have a 28% higher rate of non-contact lower extremity injuries when playing on artificial turf. Of those non-contact injuries, players have a 32% higher rate of non-contact knee injuries on turf and a staggering 69% higher rate of non-contact foot/ankle injuries on turf compared to grass." The statistics behind artificial turf are obvious compared to natural turf, as natural turf is almost more dangerous in every single non-contact injury that is measured. The information is very encouraging, I believe this gives me the final green light in choosing between the two surfaces.

Even though many real turfs are good for sports, the opinion that it should be used everywhere is incorrect, as it actually is considered worse eco-friendly wise when comparing it to artificial turf. At the end of the article "Natural vs Artificial Grass: Environmental Cost and Benefits," Jennifer Williams (2023) from *Unsustainable Magazine* states, "In conclusion, artificial turf offers a range of environmental benefits that can help reduce your carbon footprint. By requiring less water, fertilizers, and pesticides, artificial turf conserves resources and reduces harmful emissions associated with lawn maintenance. In addition, the longer lifespan of artificial turf reduces waste and the need for frequent replacements. By considering artificial turf as an

eco-friendly choice for your lawn, you can take a crucial step towards reducing your carbon footprint and contributing to a more sustainable future. We encourage you to explore the many benefits of artificial turf and consider making the switch to this environmentally friendly alternative.” Overall, some turf shouldn’t be used 100% of the time, as there needs to be balance between the two for the environment. Artificial turf is better in the eco-friendly stance, but this doesn’t mean that natural turf is worse suddenly, as the maintenance materials of natural turf is why it is not as liked in the eco-friendly world.

This topic can be concerning and can be huge for the future of sports everywhere. Natural grass should be implemented, and artificial grass should be limited, and the truth is obvious. I believe if players and people want the real turf then it should be switched. Most importantly, the value of player health is detrimental, and can affect a lot of decisions. If you or anyone ran on both surfaces, you can see a giant difference, as grass seems to be the favorite and mine as well when people rank the two. There is also a wide-spread movement in the NFL called #FliptheTurf, which targets not just American football, but all sports into switching all fake turf to real grass. So, what would you pick if you had to choose? I would definitely pick real turf, even with the cost because I believe the safety and health of players and the environment is more important than long-term cost and maintenance.

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