



## LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSED SYNTHETIC TURF FIELD PROJECT

As you scan the newspaper headlines around the country, there has been a lot of attention placed on the proposal of installing synthetic turf fields in many communities. Since it has been such a hotly debated topic, these communities have seen a relatively equal split between those opposing the fields and those supporting the initiatives. Many in opposition of these new fields cite financial and safety reasons as their top concerns. As a former college athlete and now as a sports medicine practitioner, I have had the unique opportunity to compete on and observe patients and team members playing on all types of surfaces including natural grass, the old "Astroturf" and the new "Field Turf" or "Next Turf".

Through my professional experiences and after years of reading the latest research on the innovation of synthetic turf fields, I have been able to formulate my own opinions related to the safety of these fields. But regardless of what my opinion is and what all the research says, it is absolutely essential to compare the exact same factors in any argument. It is useless to compare high school injury data from a small town in Ohio and the same injury incidence data from a professional NFL football team. What needs to be compared is what the data says for high school and modified level sports injuries as well as injury incidence data when the field conditions are at their worst. In this letter, I will attempt to outline some of the professional data related to these two distinct factors.

Even with the best efforts of our community grounds keepers, Glover Field on its best day 1 month into football season can hardly be considered a "consistent, smooth and even surface". With most of the game play taking place in the middle of the field, it is not uncommon that by week three with colder temperatures and rain, the athletes are often playing in mud. Most of the professional research specific to high school injury incidence rates states that grass fields often provide an uneven surface, which can compact to hard, high impact areas or slippery, unpredictable mud conditions. In contrast, turf fields provide an even, consistent surface that lends to fewer catastrophic injuries such as head injuries, meniscal tears and ligament tears. All rubber infill material has been found to soften the impact during landing, providing positive traction and a

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better, more consistent surface. Over the last 5 seasons of Pelham athletics, we have unfortunately seen a high incidence of anterior cruciate ligament tears in our athletes caused when landing on an uneven natural grass surface.

An independent study reported in the *American Journal of Sports Medicine* written by Barnhill and Meyers indicates that significant and unique injury differences exist between playing surfaces. More 0-day time loss injuries, more non-contact injuries like muscle strains, and more abrasions/lacerations were reported on Field Turf and more 1-2 day time loss injuries like ankle sprains and more 22+ days time loss injuries (meniscal and ligament tears), and more neural injuries were reported on natural grass fields.

As we sift through the hundreds of professional journal articles in search of more information, the simple truth remains the same....if we provide a more consistent playing surface that allows for better traction during poor weather and a softer landing surface during cold months, we can in turn cut down on more serious, season and career ending injuries in our student athletes. From my perspective as a healthcare provider and parent, if we can eliminate even 1 season ending injury per year throughout the life of the new field, then we have done our part to keep our kids healthy and our sports programs successful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Lauretani", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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