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# Rangers' choice to install turf in the new stadium might be unpopular, but it was an informed decision

By [Evan Grant](#)

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The Rangers have decided to do what no MLB team has done in the last 30 years: Open a brand new stadium with an artificial playing surface.

On Thursday, the club announced a decision to go with a new synthetic product, manufactured by Shaw SportsTurf of Calhoun, Ga., when Globe Life Field opens in 2020. The last stadium opened primarily for baseball with an artificial turf was Toronto's Rogers Centre, which opened as SkyDome in 1989.

The Rangers believe the product, marketed as "B1K" (as in batting 1.000), will create a safer, more reliable playing field than if they tried to maintain grass in their new retractable-roof stadium. The announcement culminated nearly two years of sports science research into grass vs. next generation turf.

"I got involved in this study to make sure this was the best possible synthetic playing surface for our players to play on," said Rangers senior medical director Jamie Reed, who oversaw the research. "I'm very confident this is going to be the

best artificial playing surface in the game. It will be the safest for our players and for the fans. I'm really confident this is going to be a great product."



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The new surface will feature an organic "infill" of crushed coconut shells and sand instead of rubber pellets. It will feature a still-being-fine-tuned safety pad beneath and dirt in the basepaths. It is designed to make this artificial surface safer and more reliably playable than previous generations, perhaps even more consistent and reliable than grass. Or at least the kind of grass that could be grown in a retractable-roof stadium with a playing surface more than 70 feet below street level.

Nobody, however, is saying it will make it more popular than grass.

It won't be.

Then again, despite our love affair with lush, green grass, nobody comes to a baseball game for the horticulture. You want to sit outside and look at grass, try the Arboretum. Good seats are available.

We can romanticize all we want about the smell of fresh-cut grass and all that other poetic jazz, but the truth is aesthetics aren't a real top-tier priority for an MLB field. Never have been.

What should be most important: player safety. Next: playability. After that, and

you aren't going to want to hear this, comes utility. As in being able to utilize the field for other activities and events. Because other events make money. This also may come as a shock: Owners of pro sports franchises like to make money.

In the not-to-distant past, money-making seemed to be first on the list and the other issues weren't much more than casual considerations. But the product was so bad and so distorted the game, they had no choice but to put grass back down. Too many players had their careers shortened from a generation on razor-thin plastic laid over uneven dirt or, worse, concrete.

You can't put turf down these days just to save maintenance money if it's going to put a \$100 million investment at an unnecessary health risk. That's simply bad business.

Inside Shaw Sports Turf's efforts to build a better artificial surface for ...



Technology and data are changing baseball -- and the world around us -- at an unbelievably fast rate. It stands to reason the same things can be applied to making a better, safer carpet. On the Rangers' end, they have invested significant resources into researching the safety and playability of turf. So has the company that will supply the product.

Turf has become safer. The last generation, which used rubber pellets mixed with

sand as the infill, along with a padding to disperse some energy, did seem to reduce injury risk, but balls still bounced wildly and often rocketed through infields, even those with dirt basepaths. The Rangers became more intrigued about B1K after watching air cannon tests that showed a more natural bounce.

"This new surface doesn't rebound the energy back to the ball and the player as much," said Philippe Aldahir, Shaw's director of turf innovation, research and development. "There is a level of confidence that the player is comfortable with. They don't have to adapt as much from natural grass."

The product was revolutionary enough to convince the Arizona Diamondbacks to give up on natural grass after 20 seasons of ruts, bald spots and growing lights. The D-backs are installing B1K for the 2019 season. The Rangers and Shaw will have the benefit of watching a season play out on the new surface to see if any tweaks are necessary before the rollout in Arlington. In the case of a new product, it's often better to be the second customer rather than the first.

The Rangers have 25 years' worth of first-hand knowledge on the challenges of growing and maintaining grass in what becomes a harsher environment by the year. They have two years of research into an artificial surface that might be the new best thing. Maybe by 2020, they'll even find a way to pump some freshly mowed grass scent through the air-conditioning vents at the new park.

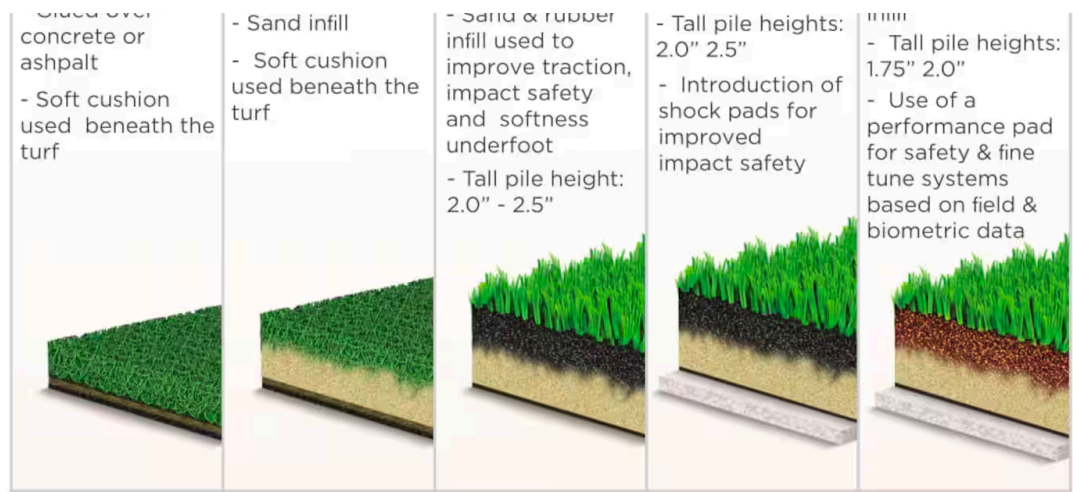
There is no doubt it will be a publicly unpopular decision.

But will it be the right one?

Not sure there is a definitive way to answer that. But it is an informed decision and that's something rather revolutionary when it comes to artificial turf, too.

## The evolution of synthetic turf

GEN 1: 1960s	GEN 2: 1970s	GEN 3: 2000s	GEN 3.5: 2010s	GEN 4: present
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nylon fibers (abrasive)</li> <li>- Short pile heights</li> <li>- Glued over</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Polypropylene fibers (less abrasive)</li> <li>- Short pile heights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction of soft, grass-like polyethylene fibers</li> <li>- Sand &amp; rubber</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continued use of polyethylene fibers</li> <li>- Sand &amp; rubber infill</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continued use of polyethylene fibers</li> <li>- Sand &amp; natural infill</li> </ul>



SOURCE: Shaw Sports Turf

(Michael Hogue / Staff artist)

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