

## Citrus Bowl should go green



As an Orlando resident, a local sod grower and a sports fan, I'm disappointed in the recent vote by the Orlando City Commission to spend a whopping \$1.5 million to turn the Florida Citrus Bowl into a field of fake grass.

But it's not too late for the rest of the sports fans of Orlando to ask City Hall to use our tax dollars wisely and to stay green with natural grass.

The conditions at the Citrus Bowl during last year's bowl games were dismal. But this was an exception, not the rule, for a venue where natural grass has performed up to professional standards for decades.

Although the idea of renovating the Florida Citrus Bowl has been in the news, the citizens have not had the opportunity to understand the choice before the city, especially the cost involved and the jobs at stake as Orlando faces key budget decisions.

Before any taxpayer money is spent, several factors should be examined to ensure that the project is feasible, economically sound and, most important, will achieve the goal of making the Citrus Bowl a draw for state and national sporting events. They include:

- The true costs of natural-grass installation, maintenance and care versus the same costs for synthetic surfaces. Correctly maintained natural-grass fields can provide a quality playing surface at a fraction of the costs being discussed.
- The latest research on sports-field injuries on artificial surfaces and player preference.
- The concerns, particularly in Florida, about

extreme temperatures on artificial fields, which can be as high as 150 degrees or more and require significant amounts of irrigation for cooling the surface to make it safe to use.

- The environmental aspects, including material content of artificial products, water and chemicals needed for cleaning, disinfecting and maintenance, and more important, the loss of the significant environmental benefits turfgrass provides. Natural turf produces oxygen, cools the atmosphere, absorbs carbon, and captures and filters rainwater and runoff. What is more "green" and fits better into the environmental green movement than responsibly managed natural turf?

Why do the Gators, Seminoles, Knights, Bulls, Canes, Bucs, Jags, Dolphins and Disney's Wide World of Sports complex all choose to play on natural grass? Why have several of these teams that have tried artificial surfaces switched back to natural grass? And what surface are the World Cup soccer championships being played on? That's right - natural grass.

If city commissioners want to make responsible budget and environmental decisions and continue to attract world-class sporting events to our city, it's critical that these discussions take place openly before a decision is made.

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