

UPEI Panthers will play on new artificial turf field this weekend

Dave Stewart dstewart@theguardian.pe.ca

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UPEI director of athletics and recreation Chris Huggan, right, said the new artificial turf field is ready for game action. He praised the fast work done by GTR Turf vice-president Jacques Zara and his team for getting the field ready ahead of schedule.

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The UPEI soccer Panthers will play their true home opener on Saturday.

Chris Huggan, athletic director at UPEI, said the new artificial turf field is officially ready to go.

The soccer teams actually have played home games already, albeit at the turf field in Cornwall.

The Dalhousie Tigers will provide the opposition with the women on the field first at 1 p.m. and the men's game at 3:15 p.m.

"This is a very big deal," Huggan said Wednesday. "Initially, they thought (it would be finished) maybe the end of September, early October so they're ahead of schedule. As it turned out, we've only missed one home game, which we had last weekend in Cornwall and now we're going to be practising and playing on the turf for the rest of the season."

The Panthers' soccer teams are expected to practise for the first time on the new turf today and Friday. Practices have been taking place in Stratford while construction work took place.

Huggan said people are going to be impressed with the work done by GTR Turf, which installed the new turf.

"It's beautiful. There is a great big Panthers head in the middle of the field and it's all very, very tidy. It is outstanding work by GTR."

Some of the old turf remains. The bleachers area now sits on the old turf.

"We saved some of the old turf so it's nice and clean and it looks great, it really does."

Huggan said it has also left a good first impression on the coaches and players.

"I think the whole community is quite excited that we have it and have it soon enough to have most of our competitive play on it this year. We appreciate the patience of all of the user groups."

It cost \$850,000 to put the new field down, paid for by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, the provincial government, UPEI and Holland College.

Most of the old turf went to Spike's Paintball in York, a facility which consists mostly of recycled objects, including old containers, giant buoys, electrical spools and spare lumber, used to build shelters and buildings.

Donating some of the old turf to Spike's reduced the project cost, as the material didn't have to be carted off to a landfill. The university closed the facility in April after receiving a report from an engineering company that concluded the turf needed to be replaced immediately.

Huggan said turf life spans between eight and 12 years and this year would have been its 12th year at the UPEI field.

Huggan said the new turf also opens the door in terms of events the facility can host.

"It is a significantly better grade than what we had. It is actually going to be FIFA certified. From hosting local, regional, national and international events . . . there will be all kinds of opportunities."

dave.stewart@tc.tc

[Twitter.com/DveStewart](https://twitter.com/DveStewart)

