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NEWPORT GAME STAYS REAL ON FAKE GRASS

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When **John Schlarman** was a standout lineman at Highlands and Kentucky in the 1990s, he spent a lot of time down in the dirt of the trenches. Now, as head football coach at Newport High School, his team practices and plays on clean, fast artificial turf. Does it bother him that a lot of games these days aren't played on real grass or in real grime?

"Not really," Schlarman said with a laugh. "Football is football whatever you play it on. Old linemen always said they'd play on a parking lot if they had to. It didn't matter. They just wanted to get after the other guys."

Fake-grass fields are sprouting up all over the place. An unofficial count shows that 16 high school facilities in Kentucky now have artificial turf. They are concentrated in Lexington (Henry Clay, Lexington Catholic, Paul Dunbar and Tates Creek), northern Kentucky (Beechwood, Covington Catholic, Dixie Heights, Highlands, Newport) and far eastern Kentucky (Belfry, Pikeville, Letcher Central). The only fake-grass fields west of here are in the Louisville area (Trinity and South Oldham) and Owensboro.

Newport played its first game on the new turf last week, but Schlarman said the biggest plus comes at practice time. "(Tuesday) we had middle-school football, freshman football, girls' soccer and varsity (football). And when we were leaving, the band was coming down to practice on it. It's amazing. I never imagined 10 years ago so many high schools would have this stuff."