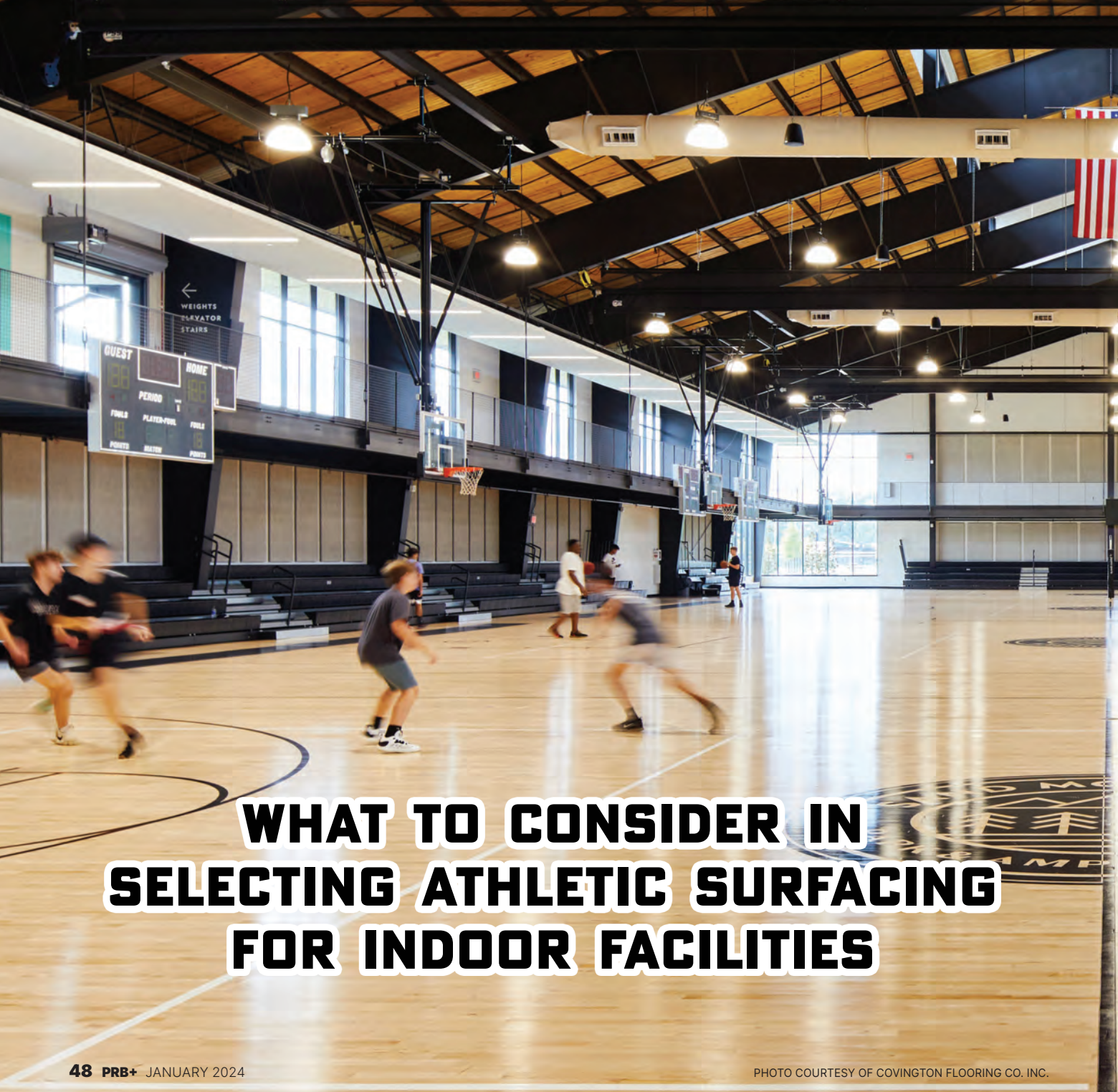


Take It Inside!

By
Mary
Helen
Sprecher



**WHAT TO CONSIDER IN
SELECTING ATHLETIC SURFACING
FOR INDOOR FACILITIES**



WHEN the weather cools down, indoor recreation centers begin to see more action. And, maybe right about now, some employees are looking at the flooring and grimacing. Maybe it's because the surface has seen better days and it's time to replace it. If so, some important questions need to be asked (and answered) prior to selecting a surface:

WHAT TYPE OF SURFACE DO YOU CURRENTLY HAVE?

While only wood floors were available back in the day, today's surfacing options include a wide variety of synthetics, including polyurethane, rubber, and even artificial turf (mainly used in facilities that host indoor soccer or field hockey). When trying to decide upon a new surface for a community area, conversations with installers and vendors can help find the right fit.

The conversation typically will begin with the intended purpose of the facility. Will it host sports only, or will there be community meetings, graduations, elections, classes, and other activities? This is a guiding force in surface selection. Most indoor facilities at the park and rec level generally fall into the "multi-tasker" category, and there are plenty of options on the market to meet this need.



HOW SHOULD THE SURFACE PERFORM?

To a certain degree, says Joe Covington of Covington Flooring Company, try to prioritize the desired properties:

- **Durability.** The surface needs to withstand heavy use and abuse from a variety of activities.
- **Slip resistance.** The surface must be slip-resistant to prevent injuries. Some surfaces provide too much friction and are unsafe for court sports like basketball and volleyball.
- **Shock absorption.** The surface needs to absorb shock to protect athletes and mitigate injuries caused by fatigue.
- **Versatility.** The surface must be able to accommodate a variety of activities, such as dance, yoga, Pilates, or martial arts, unless designated space is provided elsewhere.
- **Safety.** The surface needs to be safe for all users, including children and the elderly.

- **Easy maintenance.** The surface must be easy to maintain and clean.

In addition to these general features, there are some features that people may be looking for in indoor surfaces depending on specific activities. For example, if the surface is used for dance, the surface will need to be smooth and resilient. If used for martial arts, the surface should be soft and forgiving when participants work out barefoot. Hygiene is also a large consideration for the same reason.

Outside of foot traffic, the activities in the facility should also be considered. For example, some surfaces are better choices if tables and chairs will be set up and taken down often. If recreational and social activities like dances are held, a protective covering may be required.



THE HOPE FOR A LONG LIFE

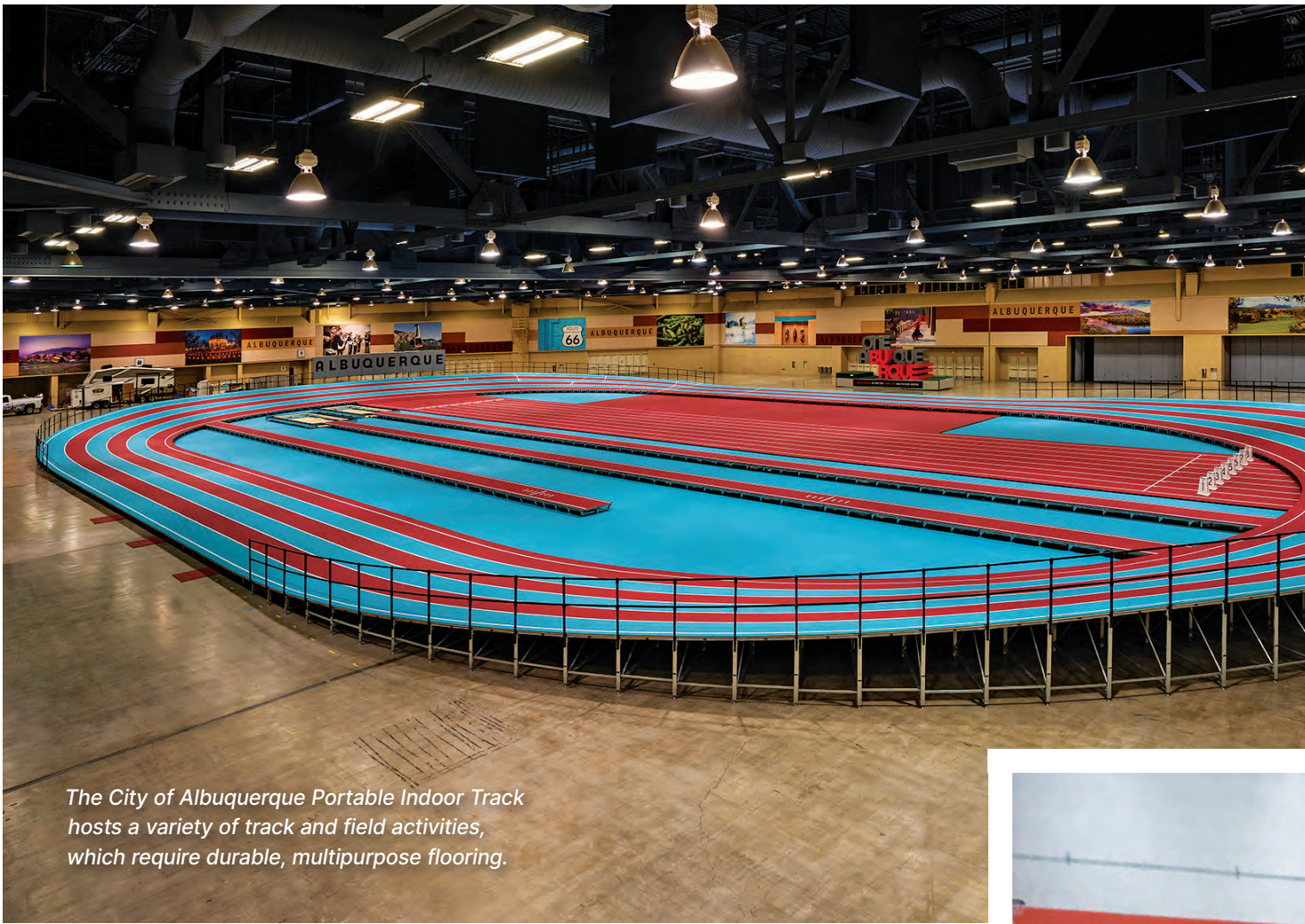
Consider also the life cycle of the surface. In terms of a budget, how long does the surface need to last before it is replaced? (Hint: “Forever” is not an option.) Covington notes that, while the analysis of life cycles in various types of flooring is an extensive discussion, it can be narrowed by asking the following:

- What is the life expectancy of the floor?
- Can the floor be totally refurbished to a “like-new” condition?
 - What is involved in refurbishing it, and what does it cost today to perform such a service?
 - What local companies are equipped to perform this work?
 - How long does it take to renew the surface?

- What is the cost of maintaining the floor on a daily/monthly/annual basis?
- Are there hidden costs associated with owning or maintaining this floor? (Examples are scrubbers, cleaning equipment, specialized coatings, or maintenance chemicals.)

The choice of a surface is never simple, and it involves thinking ahead—not just to the next season, but to several years down the road. And, unsurprisingly, there’s never one answer that works for everyone.

“Analyze the needs of the users,” says Covington. “Program directors, for example, can include directors of youth, adult, and senior sports leagues, as well as other end users. You should also bring into the discussion people like the maintenance director (who can tell you about the capabilities for regular upkeep), the purchasing agent, and the overall director.”



The City of Albuquerque Portable Indoor Track hosts a variety of track and field activities, which require durable, multipurpose flooring.

WIPE YOUR FEET, PLEASE

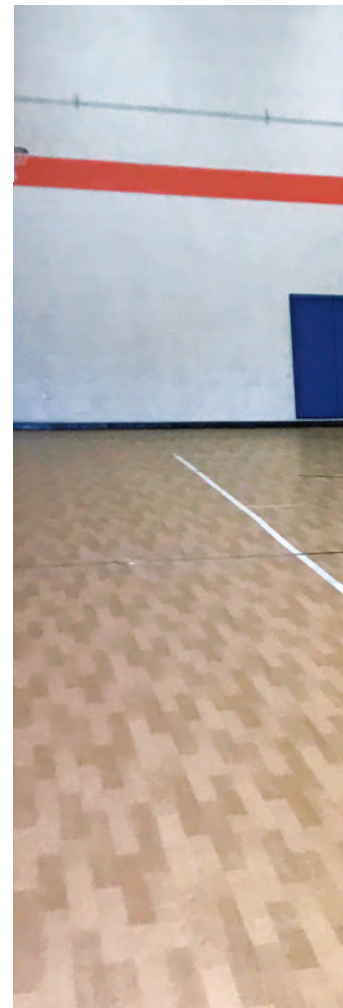
When evaluating bids from potential vendors, be sure to ask the following questions:

- Where has this floor system been installed in the area? (Make sure to talk with facility owners, not just about how the surface holds up, but how responsive the company is if there are questions or problems. A related question: What is the oldest installation in the immediate area, and how is it working?)
- Is the product manufactured by a reputable company with sufficient experience, and who will stand behind the product?

Remember that what will help any surface hold up better—and longer—is regular maintenance; sometimes that starts with some extremely low-tech tools.

“You cannot dust mop enough,” says John Praters of Praters Flooring. “It should be done daily. Dust mopping removes sand, and it’s a lack of dust mopping that can cause a floor to wear prematurely.”

While this may be particularly evident on a wood floor, no surface benefits from ground-in grit. Some manufacturers and installers advise owners to put mats near the entrance to a facility to help remove debris from shoe surfaces. And, of course, for athletic use, non-marking shoes will go a long way toward keeping floors looking new.





Speaking of athletic use, if floors are not marked for a specific sport, give your flooring installer a call before making a D-I-Y attempt that may do more harm than good.

“No tape on floors, ever,” says Jon Simons of Titan Sport Systems.

Full information on design, construction, amenities, accessories, and maintenance for indoor sports facilities can be found in the American Sports Builders Association’s publication, *Courts & Recreational Surfaces: Construction & Maintenance Manual*. This publication can be purchased in hard copy or in PDF format, from the website, www.sportsbuilders.org. **PRB+**

Mary Helen Sprecher is a technical writer for the American Sports Builders Association (ASBA), the professional association for those who design, build, maintain, and supply equipment and materials for the sports-facility construction industry. She is also the editor of ASBA’s publication, *Sports Fields: A Construction and Maintenance Manual*, and is the managing editor of *Sports Destination Management*. Reach her at mhsprecher@gmail.com, or maryhelen@sportsbuilders.org.

