



# FOOTBALL TURF IN FOCUS

Feature-writer Guy Oldenkotte looks at the recently introduced FIFA Preferred Producer programme that sets out to guarantee a standardised, worldwide quality of Football Turf, along with the latest developments from the artificial turf sector.

**T**he FIFA Preferred Producer programme is the latest quality criteria to see the light of day when world football's governing body realised that standards between FIFA licensees and new suppliers to the market was increasingly difficult for potential buyers to identify. This caused some major concerns, as FIFA recognised that artificial grass will play a significant role in the further development and promotion of the game.

The FIFA RECOMMENDED certification levels — 1 Star and 2 Star — standards only recognised particular installations and it was believed an additional standard was required to guarantee the quality of other similar installations of the same supplier, hence the introduction of a standard that considers the quality of the producer in general.

The FIFA Preferred Producer programme considers the business ethics of the supplier, the way they manage



*The latest generation of Football Turf offers the same qualities as natural grass and can be used for indoor facilities, unlike its counterpart — pictured, the new Lano Profoot MXSi system installed at Manchester United FC's indoor training facility at Carrington.*

IMAGE: LANO

production, as well as experience in installation and maintenance. On FIFA.com the programme is described as follows: "The high standards set and enforced by the FIFA Preferred Producer Concept will subsequently provide consumers with a guarantee that turf produced and installed by FIFA Preferred Producers is of the highest standard and meets consumer requirements. A FIFA Preferred Producer therefore extends their services further than the traditional supplier/ installer relationship by continually improving the quality of their product. They will be required to be both a manufacturer of Football Turf who is an established FIFA Quality Concept Licensee, and possess the additional expertise in civil engineering and project management necessary to support all elements required from inception to completion."

To date, there are five members of the FIFA Preferred Producer programme: ACT Global Sports; ➔



*Left: FIFA certified field — as artificial grass generally has a high use rate, it is important to keep it properly maintained to ensure a long lifespan.*

IMAGE: ACT GLOBAL SPORTS

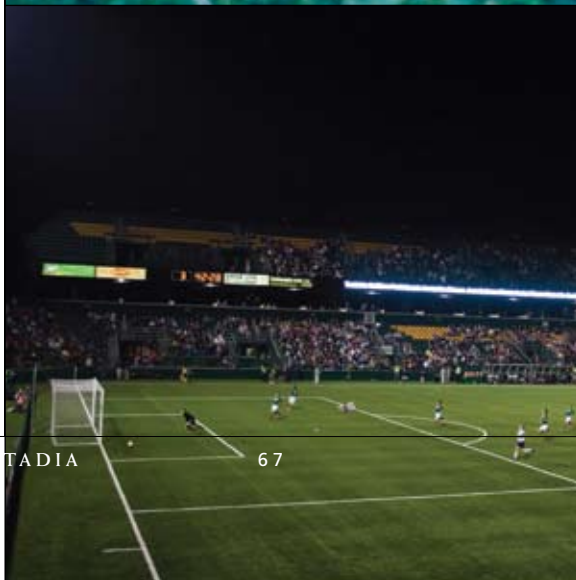


*The FIFA Preferred Producer programme ensures an internationally standardised quality at every level of the game. Pictured: QWest Field — Seattle Sounders, Major League Soccer.*



*The Lisport test, one of the most intense tests for wear simulation of artificial turf.*

IMAGE: TEN CATE



*As the popularity of soccer grows in North America, so too does the need for quality artificial turf.*



Paetec Park — home to Rochester Rhinos of the United Soccer Leagues.

IMAGE: FIELDTURF

Mbombela Stadium is one of the ten venues to host the 2010 FIFA Football World Cup starting June 11th 2010 in South Africa. The stadium will be one of the two stadiums where, for the first time since the start of the Football World Cup in 1930, the matches will be played on partly artificial grass (Desso GrassMaster). Mbombela Stadium has a seating capacity of 42,500.

IMAGE: AFP

Desso Sports Systems; GreenFields; Edel Grass and Limonta Sport.

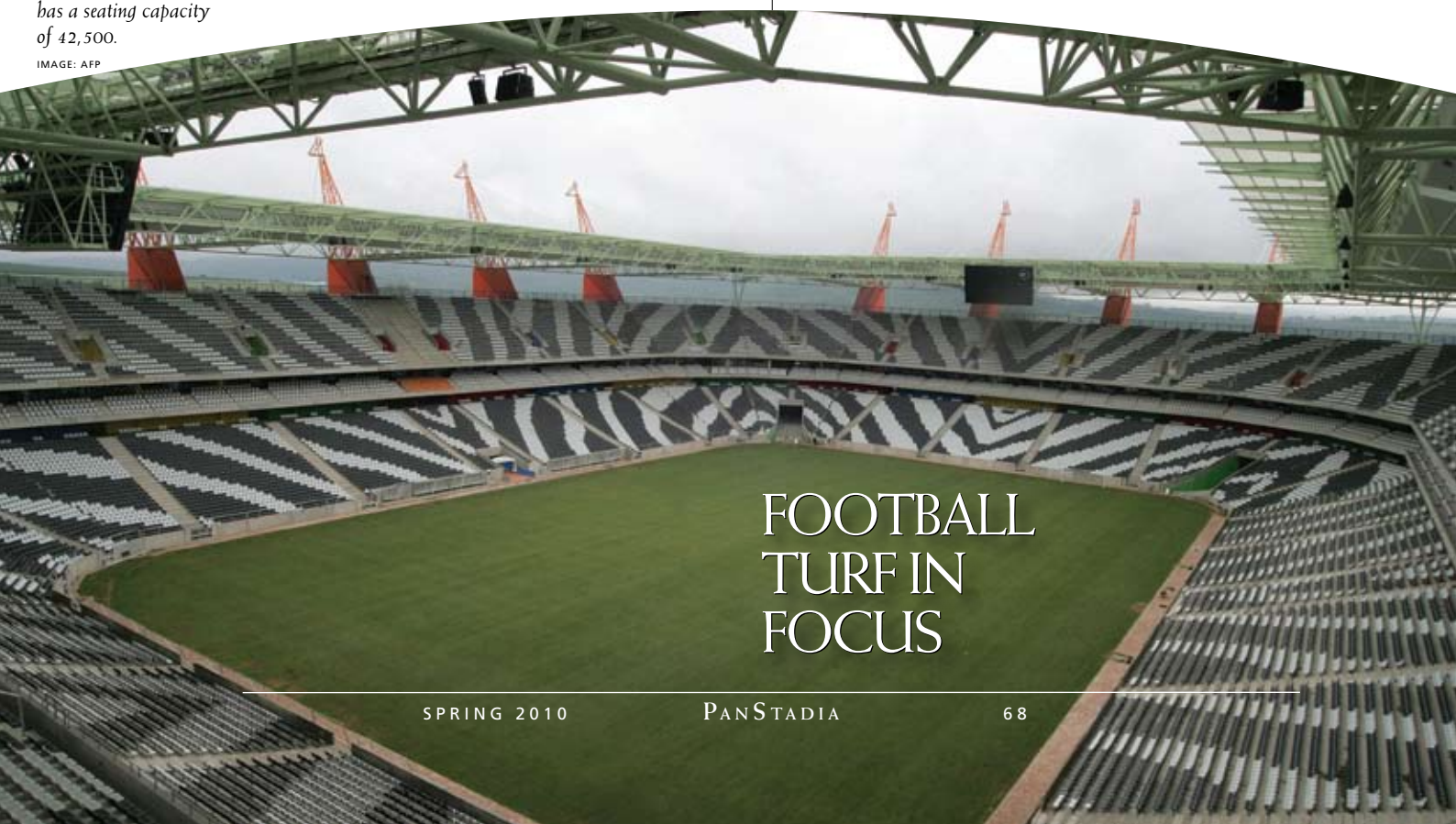
“The percentage of Football Turf installations around the world that do not meet the natural grass and durability benchmarks of the FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf is too high,” advised John Baize, Managing Director of ACT Global, one of only five companies on the FIFA Preferred Producer list. “Improvements will be achieved by focusing on quality and performance in each step of the supply chain. It starts with research and development to increase the durability and sport performance. Then the systems should be manufactured in an ISO 9001 environment. Next, the FIFA Preferred Producers are involved in training and monitoring the installation and construction, so that the final pitch matches the top quality of the original lab testing. Finally, we provide

## Football Turf


FIFA now feels it is appropriate to use ‘Football Turf’ as the designation for artificial surfaces installed as part of the FIFA Quality Concept. The main reasons for this are that this designation underlines the high quality of the pitches that are certified as part of the programme and the playing characteristics of Football Turf mirror the quality of natural grass pitches that is required to play the game at a very high level.

maintenance equipment and training to the end user to ensure long-term performance.”

Baize acknowledges that there is still limited buyer understanding in the United States about the benefits of the FIFA Quality Concept due to the differences in field sports. “While the FIFA Quality Concept is a major factor for international buyers, the U.S. market is still learning about the performance benefits of the FIFA Quality Concept. The buyers question whether those principles apply to a market dominated by American Football. We therefore conducted a research study at famed Kyle Field Stadium at Texas A&M University to analyze this. Kyle Field Stadium is an award-winning natural grass stadium that seats approximately 88,000 fans. Our research showed that the performance of this top American Football natural grass pitch would fall within the range of the FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf.”



## FOOTBALL TURF IN FOCUS



## FOOTBALL TURF IN FOCUS

*Peter Mokaba Stadium in Polokwane, the other World Cup venue where matches will be played on partly artificial grass (Desso GrassMaster). Peter Mokaba Stadium has a seating capacity of 46,000.*

IMAGE: CAMERA PRESS/  
HOLLANDE HOOGTE

### Total Quality Commitment

While the number of FIFA licensees on the FIFA 1 Star and 2 Star installation list has grown significantly in recent years, there are only five FIFA Preferred Producer's at present. It should be noted that the three companies with the most FIFA Recommended installations — FieldTurf, Polytan and Mondo — have yet to sign up to the program.

While the FIFA Preferred Producer programme can place a lot of pressure on new entries into the market, for Desso the introduction meant only administrative changes, as Helga Webers explained: "Desso has been in the industry for the last 30 years. We are completely vertically integrated. The FIFA Preferred Producer programme only required some administrative changes

from our side as our in-house service and contracting department has been there for years. They have gained sufficient experience in installing and maintaining football turf fields as the FIFA Preferred Partner programme requires."

Experience is of vital importance, as the FIFA Preferred Partner programme places ultimate responsibility for the quality of the entire system on the producer, something that was not done before.

The minimal effort required to comply with the new programme allowed Desso to continue focusing on its research, as Helga outlined: "Our 3F Fit for the Future innovation programme has been running since 2004. In this study we have combined several research focuses that ultimately should lead to the development of a more sustainable artificial grass field, which comes even closer to natural grass than existing artificial grass fields. The interaction between players and the surface is thereby elementary for us."

### Complemented with Insurance & Assurance

Edel Grass also claimed its position on the FIFA Preferred Producer list. In line with the initiative, Edel Grass installed the first football pitch with guaranteed performance conditions. This pitch was installed at FC Breukelen in The Netherlands. The project was in cooperation with TenCate Grass and Oranjewoud Sport, and is part of the TenCate Performance Warranty Concept™. This concept ensures a five-year FIFA 2 Star performance warranty with a third party insurance by Allianz Global Risk.

### Widespread Industry Acceptance

Although FIFA's Preferred Producer programme is aimed at products and system producers, Adam Coleman, of alternative infill producer USGreentech, is happy with the new quality system, as he explained: "USGreentech strongly advocates development and promotion of systems that ensure a high level of reliable, reproducible quality. FIFA's Preferred Producer program strives to guarantee that a field system will meet and then maintain a prescribed level of performance, assuring that the end user indeed gets what they paid for."

When asked about the concept of qualifying specific field components, Coleman stated: "I'm not sure how valuable it would be to qualify individual elements of a field system, because ultimately, field performance is a result of the interaction of all elements of the system. Individual component qualities could well be changed by these interactions."

## FOOTBALL TURF IN FOCUS

*As a member of FIFA's Preferred Producer programme, Edel Grass installed the first football pitch with guaranteed performance conditions at FC Breukelen in The Netherlands. The project was in cooperation with TenCate Grass and Oranjewoud Sport, and is part of the TenCate Performance Warranty Concept™.*

IMAGE: TENCATE

Bas van den Berg, Commercial Director at Edel Grass, has high hopes for the partnership and the contribution to the quality of artificial grass systems. He confirmed: "We are pleased that the manufacturers selected by FIFA are the strongest players — because this will lift the quality and performance level of the end product, which will ensure faster and wider worldwide recognition of the advantages of artificial turf football systems at all levels of the game."

Warranty and quality is becoming increasingly important, particularly as emerging nations have discovered the advantages of artificial grass and now have the funds to install such fields. But they lack the knowledge and experience to select the best product to meet their specific needs.

### *Additional Warranties*

The TenCate Performance Warranty Concept™ was first introduced at the 2009 FSB trade fair; as was published in the Autumn/Fall'09 edition of PanStadia.

"We are convinced that this new warranty concept for FIFA 2 Star compliance will enable TenCate to meet an important market need," said Guido Vliegen, Group Commercial Director of TenCate Grass. "After all, this concept gives soccer clubs the peace of mind that a new pitch will continue to meet important FIFA 2 Star performance requirements for years to come."

TenCate Grass and process certifier INTRON, a Dutch based process certifying company, have entered into a cooperation agreement in order to be able to issue performance warranties at FIFA 2 Star level. For this purpose, the builders of artificial turf systems will be certified by INTRON on quality control.

### Lasting Legacy for Football in Africa

At a sod-turning ceremony in the Mogwase township, outside Rustenburg, in South Africa, FIFA Secretary General, Jerome Valcke explained why world football's governing body is in favour of installing Football Turf pitches all over Africa: "After the last game has been played we don't want to say 'Thank you South Africa, you have been a good host, goodbye.' We want to make sure we can give to each African country an assurance that in the future there will be football leagues and football academies."

Money has been made available by the South African national lottery to have 52 Football Turf pitches installed this year alone, while almost all other African nations saw the installation of at least one Football Turf pitch materialise thanks to FIFA's Win Africa With Africa programme.

Valcke added it was his view that: "African football cannot develop if the issue of the necessary infrastructure that enabled learners to progress was not addressed. You cannot play good football if you don't have a good pitch, you need good infrastructure and that's what we are working on. We need the support of our national association and the support of the [local] government to achieve this."

### Extolling the Virtues of Knowledge

Bernd Wutzer of Polytan is well aware of the absence of knowledge in many emerging nations; the company installed the only FIFA 2 Star accredited field out of five artificial grass installations in Nigeria.

Wutzer explained: "It is not that the people don't have the money; they simply follow the masses, which is not always a good thing."



## FOOTBALL TURF IN FOCUS

All installations by Polytan include an in-situ shock pad — pictured, Red Bull Arena in Salzburg, Austria, home to FC Red Bull and a Ligaturf RS + CoolPlus pitch.

IMAGE: POLYTAN

Although Polytan does not currently appear on the FIFA Preferred Partner list, Wutzer advised: “Polytan tops the list with installations that have a FIFA 1 Star and FIFA 2 Star quality criteria. We believe that that is the best proof of the quality of our installations.”

The company was recently involved in the installation of a new pitch at the Royal Academy in Morocco, where an artificial grass field was replaced as the initial installation did not meet requirements. Wutzer commented: “The Royal Academy in Morocco had a field installed that used black infill material. This field became very hot during the summer. They therefore decided to have it replaced with a field that uses our new TPE infill material. They also believed that fields without an in-situ shock pad become very hard and that the installed fields did not perform as promised.”

As all Polytan installations automatically include an in-situ shock pad, this problem has been overcome with the new installation.

On ongoing discussion for many years has been how to avoid money being wasted on installations that do not meet with the facility's requirements. Wutzer said: “Everybody is fighting for better solutions. But only where there is no money for maintenance or little time to look after a field, will artificial grass be the best solution.”

Vast experience and many installations should therefore be important when deciding which company to go with, Wutzer advises.

### Stringent Quality Criteria

It is not only emerging nations that could benefit from a more stringent quality system.

“FIFA 1 Star seems to have become the benchmark in the UK for quality and this seems to encompass most of the criteria required at the lower level. However, the most important factor is to have in place a system whereby pitches are tested regularly as to their conformity, since this is the only way to guarantee the quality of the installation over the longer term. This will lead to a greater emphasis on maintenance, which can only be good thing,” confirmed Rick Thorley of Lano. “While many clients ask for a FIFA 1 Star-approved system, they don't always ask for their pitch to become FIFA RECOMMENDED and it's only by asking for this that they'll ensure the pitch has to be well maintained. However, the cost of this is sometimes prohibitive.”

Lano has been involved in several installations in the UK, where schools have proven to be a growing market. But the company also aims at professional clubs, as Thorley highlighted: “I would say that we're currently focusing on the top end of the market in an effort to ultimately produce the 'perfect' playing surface. As clients become more and more aware of the properties of third generation surfaces, they become more clued up as to its shortcomings over the longer term. These include an inconsistent playing surface over different areas of the pitch, a compaction of the surface, and a surface that fails to conform to FIFA 1 Star [status] after ↻

*FieldTurf has been installed at the David Beckham Academy.*

IMAGE: FIELDTURF

## FOOTBALL TURF IN FOCUS

a few years. With that in mind, we are continually striving to address these areas and produce a surface that overcomes these failings. With our recent Profoot MXSi installation at The Trafford Training Centre, Carrington, for Manchester United FC, we feel that we've certainly moved a step closer to producing such a surface."

### Creating a New Market

The introduction of new or more quality criteria makes it difficult for people unfamiliar with artificial turf and the industry to make an informed decision. For Nigel Fletcher, Managing Director of Sports CSR, Marketing & Event Management, the need for more information and awareness has opened up a new market.

While Fletcher used to be involved in FIFA's Quality Concept, he has now gone into event organisation, where he recognised a niche in the market. In December 2010, he expects some 3,000 delegates to descend on the RAI in Amsterdam for the inaugural TURF and GRASS EXPO.

Fletcher advised: "This event will simply assist organisations in understanding the benefits of artificial turf. It will give them objective, independent advice on a range of key issues. The idea is to get the facts across to the buyers for them to have the knowledge to make informed decisions. My concern is that the buyers are not always informed of which product, company, standard etc, they should choose, and what is the best value."



*TERRACOVER® being fitted over the FieldTurf in San Juan.*

FieldTurf — an industry leader in artificial turf — recently signed up as an official sponsor for The TURF and GRASS EXPO in the ‘Turf’ category.

“FieldTurf will be exhibiting the latest soccer pitch innovations in the world of artificial turf. All of FieldTurf soccer-specific pitches were designed to mirror the best of natural turf surfaces in terms of energy restitution, ball roll, ball bounce, and shock absorption,” said FieldTurf’s Marketing Manager, Jason Smollett.

“The popularity of soccer has skyrocketed in North America. The progression and success of the U.S. and Canadian men’s and women’s national teams have contributed to the soccer craze, along with the success of Major League Soccer (MLS) and the ability of teams, municipalities, and schools to provide their athletes with a quality artificial grass pitch that increases playing time, improves safety, and heightens athletic abilities,” Smollett confirmed. He continued: “FieldTurf is proud to have broken new ground with some significant ‘firsts’ in the world of soccer. FieldTurf was the first artificial turf system selected by an English premier-ship team, the first artificial surface to attain FIFA Recommended 1 Star and 2 Star status, the first artificial

### *Turf Protection*

Terraplas plc has been exclusively involved in the turf protection business for over twenty years and during the last ten — when the industry has seen exponential growth in the use of artificial turf — they have evolved as one of the major suppliers of protection covers on a global scale.

Vast numbers of multi-use indoor stadiums throughout the world use a Terraplas protection system and many of the outdoor artificial turf stadiums are now turning to Terraplas for their turf protection requirements.

Terraplas products are accepted and recommended by all of the artificial turf manufacturers. The company states that it has the only proven products on the market and is internationally acknowledged as the “World’s No.1 for Turf Protection”.

Terraplas is an official sponsor of The TURF and GRASS EXPO in their ‘Turf Protection’ category.

pitch to host a UEFA Cup Qualifying match, and the first artificial grass pitch to host the Major League Soccer (MLS) All-Star game. FieldTurf continues to redefine quality standards in the world of football.”

The TURF and GRASS EXPO will take place on 8 and 9 December 2010 at the RAI in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, where many players from the artificial grass industry will showcase their latest developments and conferences will educate attendees on how to obtain the best artificial turf solution for their venue. 🌟