

FIFA RECOMMENDED football turf at the FIFA U -17 World Cup in Mexico

There are just a few weeks to go until the FIFA U-17 World Cup kicks off in Mexico. This 14th edition of the tournament will not only be a showcase for the football stars of tomorrow, but will also mark a milestone in the history of the FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf, which since 2001 has set reliable quality standards for football turf pitches worldwide.



Apart from being some of the most admired football stars in the world today, Alessandro Del Piero, Francesco Totti, Iker Casillas, Ronaldinho, Nwankwo Kanu, Xavi and Cesc Fabregas have something else in common, too: they all made their international debuts at the finals of a FIFA U-17 World Cup.

And it will be no different this year, when the 24 best U-17 teams come together in Mexico from 18 June to 10 July 2011 to compete for the title of world champions. Once again, the focus will be on up-and-coming young players, who will use the tournament as a springboard for their international careers. The players will have come a long way from their first tentative kick-about to playing in the biggest, most famous stadiums in the world.

FIFA RECOMMENDED football turf ensures equal conditions – wherever, whenever

In comparison to their footballing heroes, many of today's young players often already have experience playing on high-quality football turf from an early age. Football turf is being used increasingly around the world, particularly in areas where the consistent maintenance and care of natural grass is not possible because of climatic conditions or is simply not feasible from a financial point of view. As well as providing the operators of pitches for community or professional use with a series of advantages, high-quality football turf particularly benefits the players. Not least, it means that they can train continuously in the same conditions wherever they are in

the world. That all players are given the same chances also benefits youth development.

Football turf has been a feature of the FIFA U-17 World Cup for some time now. As far back as 2005, at the U-17 World Cup in Peru, all 32 matches were played on modern, FIFA-certified football turf pitches. As part of its commitment to quality assurance for football turf, FIFA paid particular attention to that tournament in Peru, and it was used as the benchmark for other matches on natural turf. In addition to the players' opinions on the playability of the pitches, which were resoundingly positive, even among those players with no previous experience of playing on artificial turf, a number of other factors were taken into account. For example, the FIFA Medical Assessment and Research Centre (F-MARC) compared all the matches in Peru with previous U-17 World Cups. The results are testament to the advances made in the area of football turf, with both the number and type of injuries almost exactly the same as those incurred on natural grass. The findings of further medical studies have also yet to reveal any significant differences between the two types of playing surface.

Volcanic football turf

The U-17 national teams will again have the chance to experience the excellent playability of modern football turf at this year's tournament in Mexico. One of the stand-out stadiums for the upcoming U-17 World Cup, which was already used in the qualifying competi-

tion, is the Estadio Omnilife in Zapopan, north-west of Guadalajara. Chivas Guadalajara's home ground, which was completed just last summer, has aptly been nicknamed "the volcano": the 45,500-seater stadium is almost invisible from outside as it is sunk in a crater. Only the roof, which hangs spectacularly above the grass-covered crater like a cloud, gives any indication of the intended use of this very futuristic structure.

The stadium's playing surface is just as innovative as its architecture, featuring a state-of-the-art football turf pitch. The Estadio Omnilife is one of the latest additions to the list of more than 600 football turf pitches worldwide to have received FIFA certification.

FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf

The increasing acceptance of such high-quality football turf pitches is hardly surprising: they are robust, weather-resistant, low-maintenance and do not require any regeneration. As a result, in addition to clubs and stadium operators, communities and schools are also catching on to the advantages of the latest generation of football turf, whose playability is the equal of natural grass in almost every respect.

This high level of acceptance is largely down to the FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf, which since 2001 has set reliable global quality standards for football turf pitches. One of the key elements of this successful concept is the FIFA RECOMMENDED quality mark, which is awarded to pitches that have passed two phases of intensive testing conducted by independent test institutes, which include laboratory analyses and field testing. Very high standards are set, with natural turf in top condition providing the benchmark.

The pitch at the Estadio Omnilife has been awarded the FIFA RECOMMENDED 2 STAR quality mark, a football turf pitch standard that meets the very highest demands of professional and elite football. Since 2004, this standard has been a complement to the FIFA RECOMMENDED 1 STAR standard for amateur and grassroots football. It is permitted to use FIFA RECOMMENDED football turf pitches to stage international matches.

Peace of mind from start to finish

The technical attributes of the product are one thing, but the final acquisition of an installed pitch quite another. With this in mind, as part of the Quality Concept FIFA launched the Preferred Producer programme in 2009 to offer buyers of football turf pitches a comprehensive quality guarantee. To be accepted into the programme, football turf producers must satisfy each and every one of the installation criteria and already have experience in implementing the FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf. Producers are also required to provide a high level of service and are obliged to continuously develop existing football turf concepts. For the buyer of a football turf pitch, choosing a FIFA Preferred Producer is simple and safe, since they only need to coordinate with one service provider, who ensures the highest level of quality and offers peace of mind from start to finish – from planning and installation to regular maintenance.

Green in every sense

The architects of the Estadio Omnilife were keen to ensure that the stadium would connect with nature and be well adapted to its surroundings. The green surroundings served as inspiration and resulted in water consumption, energy, air quality and urban planning becoming key criteria in the project. It was almost inevitable, therefore, that the playing surface would be football turf, given that it does not need to be watered and maintenance costs are lower than for natural grass. Furthermore, regardless of weather conditions, perfect playing conditions are guaranteed.

A long term partnership has been started between the environmental protection authority EPEA and Desso Sports Systems, one of FIFA's five Preferred Producers, which carried out the football turf installation at the Estadio Omnilife, thus ensuring that environmental factors were taken into account on a whole new level. Desso is one of the first companies in this industry to follow the cradle-to-cradle principle, going far beyond simple sustainability. By using this approach, the goal is to design environmentally responsible products which can be re-used as components for new products.

In addition to the careful handling of resources, this high-quality pitch, which is more robust than standard natural grass, offers ideal multi-purpose use for concerts and all sorts of other events.

Eight World Cup matches on football turf at the Estadio Omnilife

The football turf pitch at the Estadio Omnilife will really be put to the test during the FIFA U-17 World Cup, when it will stage six group matches as well as a quarter-final and a semi-final. For the Mexican national team in particular, playing on football turf is not a daunting prospect, having already won the FIFA U-17 World Cup in Peru in 2005, one of the most important titles in their footballing history.

Football turf made its debut at a FIFA tournament two years before that, also at a FIFA U-17 World Cup, this time in Finland in 2003, when one of the four venues, Töölö stadium in Helsinki, had a football turf pitch. So football turf and the FIFA U-17 World Cup are something of a tradition by now, as today's crop of superstars, who made their first international appearances on FIFA-certified football turf pitches, know only too well.