

PITCH MATTERS

October 2023

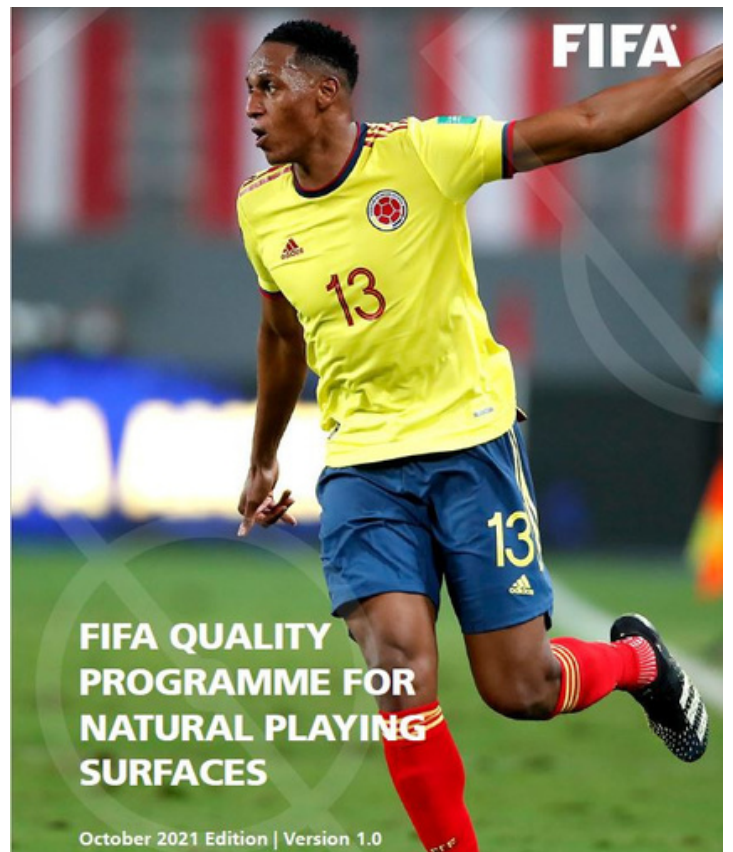


FIFA NATURAL PLAYING SURFACES - Pitch Testing with Accuracy

Did you know that back in October 2021, FIFA launched the FIFA Natural Playing Surfaces manual, which describes the procedures for assessing natural turf football pitches under the FIFA Quality Programme.

FIFA as the world's global governing body have the reach to share it far and wide through member associations of which there are 211 affiliated associations.

Despite specifications being available for artificial turf for a number of years, until 2021 there had not been a global pitch testing standard that communicates good practice and gives support to ground staff as a mechanism for ongoing objective comparison.



PITCH ASSESSMENT FOR COMPETITION DELIVERY



Monitoring the performance of the pitch, particularly in the pressure cooker of elite tournaments and leagues allows the move from more subjectivity to more objective pitch quality assessments - a fairer approach.

Leagues, competitions and tournaments can adopt and reference the FIFA programme in its project scope as a delivery expectation, by using accredited testing institutes and trained and approved agronomists.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR GROUND STAFF IN SELF-ASSESSMENT

Within the FIFA NPS, ground staff are encouraged to take regular pitch measurements. Pitch data is becoming an ever-increasing part of day-to-day groundsmanship.

Venues and Grounds staff gather data for a range of reasons, but having a globally recognised program allows for better comparisons and understanding of data

PLAYER INJURY MITIGATION

Considering the safety of the player is paramount, player surface interaction tests are described to assess the playing surface. It is hoped that by increasing the understanding of how surfaces perform, in time this will help reduce player injury.

Take for example rotational resistance an obvious test to articulate underfoot traction, and thus correlate to the incidence rate of lower extremity injuries.



CLUB COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

In certain cases, clubs may choose to gather pitch performance data in order to identify key performance metrics of the pitch they are going to play on. Regular data collection allows for more consistent surfaces. Against their own pitches, the numbers in the test report can help them do this. Used in the right manner, this could potentially provide a competitive advantage for the forward-thinking clubs. An example being training on the pitch at your training centre that mirrors your stadium, or the away stadium you are going to play at.



THE FIFA NPS WILL PROVIDE BETTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACCURACY

1. FIFA Round Robin - the accreditation of independent test institutes begins with their assessment at the FIFA round-robin. A pass or fail assessment, to see if the laboratory can test accurately. There is an accredited list.

2. ISO 17025 - the test institutes must hold ISO 17025 quality mark, which is an annual external audit done by the regulatory body in their country. This inspection interrogates calibrations, testing demonstrations, project administration audit and personnel training records, etc. FIFA require this.

3. FIFA have a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) dedicated to improving FIFA quality programs. The TAG helps drive evolution of the FIFA programme and standard, making sure innovation and time sensitive anomalies are addressed. This keeps the programme up to date.



FINALLY - WHY WILL THIS BE A GAME CHANGER?

You will be able to go to the FIFA resource hub and get information that provides a globally consistent standard to help achieve a better understanding on what makes an elite playing surface and a consistent approach to pitch improvement and assessments across the world.

The FIFA quality programme resource hub is already developed, utilised and growing daily, used by confederations such as UEFA when assessing stadium suitability.

Some other product categories listed on [FIFAs resource hub 'live'](#):

- Number of balls: 1089 Balls
- Number of Artificial Turf pitches: 2118 Pitches
- Number of Goal Line Tech installs 104 Stadiums



As an industry we are becoming more used to using objective pitch data to support pitch management decisions, so the data needs to be accurate and collected in a repeatable fashion. As an industry this is a key time in pitch testing history, particularly with the increasing shift to more sustainable practices, like reducing irrigation, and imposed chemical restrictions. We can be smarter with accurate data.

Get in touch to find out more & get your own competitive advantage!



FIFA NATURAL & HYBRID PITCH TESTING STANDARDS WEBINAR

8th November 14:00 - 15:00 BST

Natural & Hybrid pitches have recently benefitted from developments in testing equipment and testing protocols. Defined and managed by Footballs governing body FIFA, this will improve objective testing measurements around the world. both in an independent and self assessment capacity.

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+44 (0)1506 444 755



info@propitch.online

