

Synthetic Turf – The Process and the Future

2015 saw Souths United become the **first Club in Queensland** to have FIFA approved synthetic turf fields. In fact, we're the first grassroots club in Australia to gain FIFA's highest certification. There are an additional three facilities in NSW: two are Council run and the other is a Representative Club. Our certification was completed mid-year and, as expected, attained the **QUALITY PRO** rating – the highest FIFA awards. These fields are of the same standard as the following international clubs/venues:

- Victoria Stadium, Gilbratar, England
- Wolverhampton Wanderers, Wolverhampton, Great Britain
- Commonwealth Stadium, Edmonton, Canada
- Birmingham City FC, Birmingham, England
- Citrus Bowl, Orlando, USA
- Training Grounds for:
 - AFC Ajax, SC de Toekomst, Duivendrecht, Netherlands
 - Celtic FC, Glasgow, Scotland
 - Manchester City FC (Academy), Manchester, England
 - Bayern Munich, Munchen, Germany

There are many advantages to having synthetic turf fields:

- Drought resistant
- No grass cutting required
- No linemarking required
- Ability to play during and after rain events
- No off-season refurbishment downtime.

For Souths United to remain in such elite company and retain our accreditation, we **MUST** maintain the fields accordingly. **THIS INVOLVES EVERYONE.**

There are some differences, some less obvious, between natural and synthetic turf fields.

	NATURAL	SYNTHETIC
Boots	Metal or Moulded tags are ok to use.	Moulded tags ONLY . Because synthetic turf is laid in rolls like carpet, metal tags can tear the 'carpet'. Tears, whilst they can be patched, will shorten the life of the surface.
Leaves	Leaves break down and become mulch which helps promote growth of the turf and provides nutrients to the soil.	Leaf litter is a natural enemy of synthetic turf. The leaves break down and become embedded in the infill layer. This prevents the infill from working to its optimum and will also promote the growth of mould. As they decompose, they provide a breeding area for weeds and natural grass. Synthetic fields cannot easily be sprayed for weeds!

	NATURAL	SYNTHETIC
Mud, Dirt	Limited effect.	Mud and dirt get compacted into the top surface of the turf. This is not removed by grooming. This prevents the infill from working to its optimum and will also promote the growth of mould and weeds and natural grass.
Stones	Slight danger to players and when mowing.	The sharp edges have a similar effect as metal tags.
Food	No effect.	Food invites ants and encourages mould growth.
Chewing Gum	Little effect.	Cannot be easily removed and will encourage mould growth.
Drinks eg soft drink, Gatorade, coffee etc	No effect. Liquid will be absorbed into the soil.	Sugar content will encourage ants and all drinks will promote mould growth.
Stiletto Heels	Harms the shoes more than the field surface!	The small surface area of the heel can easily pierce the carpet causing tears.
Leaving the Field and re-entering eg jumping fences	No effect. Possible harm to fence and player.	An increased risk of bringing soil, mud, dirt etc back onto the surface of the field. Possible harm to fence and player.

Our Groundsman and his helpers put **many hours in each week** grooming the fields and general maintenance.

The fields need to be **groomed 2 – 3 times a week**. This involves using the special **grooming machine** attached to a quad bike and slowly sweeping the field. The grooming machine picks up the surface matter eg leaves, and the infill and sifts it returning the infill. The grooming machine needs to be used in definite patterns so that the turf pile/nap is not damaged and that the heavy wear areas (corners, 6 yard box, penalty spots and centre circle) have the infill replenished to the correct level.

Unfortunately, the grooming machine **does not pick up** the nuts from the surrounding trees nor any bird droppings, foreign objects eg chewing gum, lollies, and larger twigs. Also, the leaves inconveniently fall continuously and therefore mount up in between the 2 – 3 grooming sessions.

As mentioned before, **EVERYONE** needs to take responsibility for maintaining the quality of the playing surface. The playing surface has a lifespan of 10 years and the sub-surface, 20 years. Therefore, with a replacement playing surface, the fields are expected to last 20 years. This is a huge investment in and responsibility for current and future players.

Players and parents can play a **MAJOR** role in the continuing maintenance of the fields at training sessions and games by collecting leaves, nuts and twigs in plastic bags or buckets. Spend 10 minutes prior or after training or in between games – every little bit **WILL** help. Please liaise with a member of the management committee.

For those parents or grandparents that have spare time during the week, our groundsman would appreciate assistance. FULL training will be provided. Contact John Provians on 0413 187 398 or at provians@live.com.au