

# “The quality of the turf is crucial”

ARTIFICIAL TURF IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL: INTERVIEW WITH THE KNVB

Artificial turf has been growing in popularity in the Netherlands for years. As football's governing body, the Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB) aims at establishing a high standard of quality for artificial pitches. Quality control is performed to some degree by the professionals of the Eredivisie themselves – an interesting approach. In the interview Patrick Balemans, Policy Advisor at the KNVB, explains the role artificial turf plays in the Netherlands today, and what developments are taking place in this sector.



Patrick Balemans,  
Policy Advisor,  
Royal Netherlands  
Football Association  
(KNVB)

**Q** What is your responsibility at the KNVB?

**A** I work as a Policy Advisor for facilities at the KNVB. My role is to raise the quality of facilities in the Netherlands. A major part of my activities is about standards: Creating standards for the amount of pitches for a club in relation to the members of the club; defining standards for the dressing rooms and the club houses; informing clubs how to maintain the pitches; developing a long term vision and policy for facilities. Or, in brief: helping to ensure the ideal conditions for the game.

**Q** How important is the issue of quality playing surfaces to the KNVB?

**A** Falling back on quality pitches is highly important – generally and even more in countries such as the Netherlands. The reason is the high population level combined with a lack of space to create new or extra pitches, especially in urban areas. Therefore it is important to ensure that the existing pitches are well maintained.

**Q** What role does artificial turf play in Dutch football?

**A** It plays an increasingly important role. With artificial fields there are nearly no cancellations, which means no delays in the competition schedule. Due to maintenance periods natural grass pitches cannot be used around 10 to 12 weeks a year whereas an artificial field can be used on a constant level throughout the year. This is a major advantage for clubs as they can organize tournaments during the holidays or use their pitches for other activities inside or outside of the out-of-competition period. When considering the mentioned lack of space, it becomes clear that an artificial pitch is equal to two or three natural pitches in terms of the frequency of use. Apart from the regular schedule, this is also vital for other factors such as the promotion of youth teams and young talents.

**Q** Are there any restrictions on playing professional football on artificial turf in the Netherlands?

**A** In the Netherlands there are no restrictions for playing on artificial turf, neither for the professional league, nor the amateur league. However, the quality of the turf is crucial. Nowadays, with concepts such as the FIFA RECOMMENDED fields, artificial turf is of high quality in all aspects, so most Dutch players prefer to play on such pitches. This also applies for the training: For the professional league it is important to train on the same pitch on which competition is played, because you get the same conditions.

**Q** What quality criteria do you, as an association, pay particular attention to?

**A** There are a lot of decisive factors which are related to the durability, safety and playability of the field. Most important is to listen to the players. If the players complain about the pitch because of poor conditions, then the standards or the methods and procedures to measure the conditions have to be improved. This is where KNVB and FIFA are on the same wavelength.

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Ajax Amsterdam training center

**Q** In your opinion, what are the advantages of FIFA RECOMMENDED artificial turf?

**A** With a FIFA-certified construction the club is sure of high quality, long durability and also a good installation. This means less discussion about playability of a pitch. That is only possible when maintained and used properly as written in the guidelines from the producers. The most important thing is, that FIFA RECOMMENDED turf provides all the benefits you would expect from an ideal field, so that all parties concerned can concentrate on what really counts: the football game.

**Q** In the top leagues in the Netherlands, the captain of the visiting team always rates the pitch after every match. How are artificial turf pitches faring?

**A** Some years ago, the rates were not really positive, but this could have also been the result of winning or losing a game. Furthermore, this had also to do with the mindset some players and coaches might have, due to experiences with dated poor-quality artificial turf, so it was not always objective. Currently we see that this will change as artificial fields become more common in the professional league in the Netherlands. Because of the high quality of artificial pitches and all developments that are still going on, rates will improve automatically. In this context, initiatives such as the FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf with its FIFA RECOMMENDED fields are very helpful.

More information about the FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf, the FIFA Preferred Producers as well as all FIFA RECOMMENDED football turf pitches is available at:  
[www.fifa.com/footballturf](http://www.fifa.com/footballturf)

E-Mail: [football.turf@fifa.org](mailto:football.turf@fifa.org)