



# Newsletter

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Welcome to the first BLC Sports newsletter, a quarterly review of the UK synthetic turf market, with an occasional reference to the wider world. We will touch on product designs and trends, system performances and key aspects such as installation and maintenance. Each review will also feature company news and opinions on the state of the market.

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# Introducing BLC Sports

BLC Sports advises companies, pitch owners and those planning sports facilities, on all aspects relating to synthetic turf. With 25 years experience in the UK and overseas markets the formation of a consultancy able to impart advice made sense, and the successes achieved to date verify the decision for principal, Bryn Lee, to make his knowledge available to the market.



The first contract secured was with Easigrass Sport, who commissioned BLC Sports to design and brand a range of synthetic turf products for the UK market. The resulting Rhino-Turf range has proven a great success and every installation to date has been a resounding triumph. More of Rhino-Turf later.

Another company to benefit from working with BLC Sports is Recticel, whose Rebound range was introduced into the market a few years ago. In the last twelve months the range has become accepted as the foremost pre-formed shockpad system in the UK market partially due to the strategic planning involving BLC Sports. Rebound has now been installed by several contractors throughout the UK and can be seen on many new pitches.

At the start of 2012 BLC Sports was approached by the world's number one manufacturer, CCGrass, to represent and promote their range in the UK market. In less than six months sales in the UK have surpassed those achieved in the previous five years, with both full size pitches and smaller areas laid with CCGrass products.

And finally back to the role of BLC Sports within the Easigrass Group. This has enabled each division to have a sounding board and "in house" technical support on all matters relating to synthetic turf. The same support is also available to Rhino-Turf construction partners.

For further information on BLC Sports please see the website, [www.blc-sports.com](http://www.blc-sports.com).



# Comment

In recent days the Football League has decided not to allow synthetic turf to be installed in stadiums by their clubs. This follows an extensive review where opinion was received from all interested parties. The decision is not unexpected with the clubs in Division Two voting in favour, but those in Division One and the Championship hostile. But the real impact will be found further down the leagues.



Unless the FA allows clubs to play on synthetic turf in the FA Cup, lower teams in the BlueSquare Conference and feeder leagues will not benefit from improved surfaces, extra income from hiring out the pitch and greater control over junior and age group teams. A time limit should be given for acceptance, with rules put in place that:

- Guarantee all clubs, including Premiership teams, must play on synthetic turf if drawn away in the FA Cup to a team with such a pitch.
- BlueSquare Conference teams promoted to the Football League are allowed to keep their synthetic surface.
- Teams subsequently promoted to Division One must return to natural turf or forfeit promotion, until such time as synthetic turf is accepted into that league.
- A dedicated Executive is appointed to oversee the introduction of synthetic turf and its acceptance into the professional game.

With every other country in Europe and many around the world accepting synthetic turf why does England remain in the dark ages? Fear and a lack of knowledge are probably the answers, but it does little to help accepting a type of surface, which has assisted Spain, Holland, Germany and other countries develop more and better skilled players than most English clubs.

Time for the FA to get involved and at least open the door a little.



# Rhino-Turf News

Not a bad start to the year! First the pitch built by Kestrel and surfaced with Rhino-Turf VT60 in Warrington was tested and passed at the highest standards in football, then the pitch re-built by Verde Recreo in Abertillery, surfaced with Rhino-Turf VT40, also passed with flying colours. These two installations add to the fields tested last year to FIH National standards in London. With fields currently under construction due for testing, Rhino-Turf will shortly have accredited IRB pitches as well.

## Abertillery

Verde Recreo took on the challenge of upgrading a council pitch in Abertillery to a 3G surface, in the early months of this year. What the client received exceeded expectations and is probably the best 3G pitch in Wales. The system chosen was Rhino-Turf VT40 laid onto a 20mm ELayer pad over a regraded unbound stone base. The levels achieved are better than some traditional engineered bases, with perfect flatness throughout.

Under pressure, due to weather delays, installers Sports Surface Solutions, together with Dutch company JenE undertook to install the surface in record time. With a wealth of experienced fitters, a fleet of machinery designed for pitch installation and the expert organizational skills of Rob Key from Verde Recreo, the pitch was laid in just under 30 working hours. Two days after completion it was tested to the highest standards in football by Sportslabs, and passed with a ball roll of 6m.



A unique feature of the Rhino-Turf VT range is the "thatch" zone designed to support the upright monofilament fibres whilst containing the infill. With correct infilling the pitch is ready to play on immediately, and requires no after brushing to regulate the infill. As Nick Wells from Sports Surface Solutions adds, "We don't want to leave a pitch unfinished, and this includes getting the infill right. We always infill in layers, ensuring even depths of materials are applied. The Rhino-Turf VT40 is a dream to work with in this respect, and the density of fibres ensures a green finish."

In fact so good is the top that by brushing the surface in different directions stripes, associated with natural turf, are possible. Last word goes to James Jenkins at Verde Recreo, "This was our first Rhino-Turf installation, and we have been overwhelmed by the positivity it has created. We always aim to deliver a first class job for our customers, but this has taken quality to a whole new level."

The full video of the 30 hour installation can be seen on the Rhino-Turf website [www.rhino-turf.com](http://www.rhino-turf.com). More information on Verde Recreo can be found at [www.verderecreo.co.uk](http://www.verderecreo.co.uk).



## More on Rhino-Turf HF30

Last year Featherstone School in Southall approached BLC Sports with a particular dilemma. Their eight year old sand dressed pitch was out of action due to seam failures and line movement. The damage seemed to have been caused by a combination of insufficient sand in the surface in the first instance and the removal of sand by their maintenance company (a well known national company who are no longer retained by the school). Further damage seems to have been caused by the heavy cross field football use.

The school wanted a hockey product but was afraid to go with sand dressed again. The solution was actually easy – stick with sand dressed but put a lot more sand into the surface in the first place. To achieve this the pile of the surface was increased to 30mm. This is not possible with most manufacturers because of the type of tufting equipment used, limiting the pile height possible.



Not so for Rhino-Turf whose manufacturer, CCGrass, has the very latest technology to produce the required product.

The pitch was laid at Featherstone and has been a resounding success. The surface looks and feels like a regular 18mm texturized monofilament PE surface, but the difference is what is in it. The weight of sand normally applied to an 18mm product is between 10-12kg per sqm. Rhino-Turf HF30 has 22kg of weight added to it. And with a further twist a sprinkling of rubber granules was added to make the system more football friendly.



When Sportslabs tested the pitch, it not only passed with flying colours but the actual results were almost identical to those on a standard 18mm surface. Feedback from hockey users is positive and the footballers love it, as facility manager, Juma Abdullahi explains, “We had a problem, we don’t now. The school usage is non-stop during the day, and evening football use fully booked. Our weekend hockey clubs love the new surface and we are even turning away bookings as the new pitch is full. Rhino-Turf really works for us.”

Once again such a success is not just down to the surface, but how well it has been installed. Sports Surface Solutions, under the management of Easigrass Sport, laid a new insitu pad before laying the turf, which was ready to play on the moment the installation crew left the school. For more details visit the Rhino-Turf website, [www.rhino-turf.com](http://www.rhino-turf.com)

# Update on Henley

When Henley Mens and Ladies played their first matches at the resurfaced Jubilee Park pitch both teams recorded wins. Credit was given to the new Rhino-Turf HF18 surface installed by Easigrass Sport. But praise was also heaped upon the local Town Council for funding



the upgraded facility, and in turn BLC Sports for its assistance in the project.

During the rest of the season rave reviews have been received from many players and also visiting coaches. And with a number of similar hockey surfaces recently laid at neighboring clubs it was very satisfying to hear that the new Henley Rhino-Turf pitch is rated the best for performance and appearance.

Another resounding success at Henley is the sprint track installed



alongside the pitch. Local personal trainers are incorporating outdoor fitness sessions on the fast track, whilst athletes are able to train on the four lane surface.

The success of the Rhino-Turf HF18 at Henley has led to a number of clubs and schools placing orders for the same surface this year. For more information on Henley's pitch visit [www.blc-sports.com](http://www.blc-sports.com) for a



day by day photo record of the complete resurfacing programme.

Details on Rhino-Turf HF18 can be found on the Rhino-Turf website, [www.rhino-turf.com](http://www.rhino-turf.com)

## Rhino-Turf abroad



As part of the Rhino range of branded products it is no surprise that interest has come from overseas markets, especially where rugby is played. The first major Rhino-Turf export order is for a full size Rhino-Turf CM65 pitch for Centaurs RFC in Singapore. The installation is well under way and the first matches are expected to be played on the new surface in August.

Further afield Rhino-Turf is now available in Africa and has orders for areas in Namibia, Botswana, Nigeria and South Africa. In the Middle East Rhino-Turf will be laid on new pitches later this year.

## CCGrass News

Already the world's largest single manufacturer with over 11 million sqm produced in 2011, this year has even surpassed their expectations with an increase of 1 million sqm in the first quarter. With the new 50million sqm capacity factory due to open later this year, CCGrass expect to consolidate their position as market leader in many markets.

After several years trying to break into the UK market a more structured approach was agreed upon, working with BLC Sports as their local representatives. The challenge to gain acceptance for a



new range, that threatens the pricing structure set up by European manufacturers, is also an opportunity to raise the quality of synthetic turf at a more affordable price. Each installation has shown that surface performance is on a par with the best Europe can offer, and the ability to purchase a top surface at significantly lower prices is proving attractive to some more enlightened contractors.



Newcastle United star Steven Taylor demonstrates his skills on the new CCGrass pitch to pupils at Valley Gardens Middle School in Whitley Bay.

For the UK there remains skepticism from many quarters, but this dissipates with every successful CCGrass surface supplied. In the early months of 2012 this has included full size pitches in north Scotland, Whitley Bay and at York University, which all feature the Nature D3 product. CCGrass pitches meet the highest standards for football, and several installations have achieved full accreditation.

CCGrass products offer real value based on a balance of exceptional quality and affordability. In fact most CCGrass products are superior in weight to most European equivalents, with a whopping 500g extra weight in some cases. Products are made in their entirety on one site, with yarn extruded then transferred to the neighboring tufting building, before the latex or PU backing is applied in the next building. A simple operation made incredibly effective by careful planning and management.



In the landscape market CCGrass has also become the leading company in innovation and product design, with their products winning awards at major events.



## A view on shock pads

No pitch should now be laid without a resilient pad beneath. Quite simply we have enough experience now to realise that pitches play better for longer, are safer to use and can be a much better investment when a shock pad is involved.

The above statement is taken as read when it comes to hockey, but recent advances in ELayer construction means that new pitches no longer need an asphalt base beneath the shockpad. Of course only a handful of companies are capable of building unbound bases good enough for an ELayer, but those that can provide a more hockey friendly system, and at a lower cost.

When it comes to football and rugby the need for a shockpad is paramount for performance and safety. Despite this it is staggering to see some consultants and specifiers still recommending unnecessary and expensive “engineered bases.” Contractors see this type of base as a way to increase profit and negate the need for skilled workmanship that is a prerequisite when an unbound base is built. Once a shock pad is added the base beneath only has to remain stable, and if designed that way, free draining.

Under 3G type surfaces there are a number of options in deciding which type of pad to choose. Possibly the most successful in rugby terms is the Brock system, which uses the pad not just for resilience but for water flow management as well. This allows an impermeable base to be laid at a reduced cost, compared with a porous base. From a sports perspective the Brock Performance Base provides a



firm surface to play on, yet shock absorption when necessary. For more information on Brock go to [www.brock-international.com](http://www.brock-international.com)

The king of roll out pads is Rebound from Recticel. The open cell foam pad is made from recycled material and the density is carefully controlled to offer excellent playing characteristics. This pad is ideal laid over stone or used in upgrading old engineered bases, and is rising in popularity in the UK because of its "easy to use" nature. For more information on Rebound go to [www.rebound.com](http://www.rebound.com)

ELayers are not just for hockey and work exceptionally well under 3G surfaces, provided the right amount of binder is used. Unfortunately many Insitu rubber pads laid in recent years disintegrate when the synthetic turf is replaced, mainly through a lack of binder during original installation. But get the binder right and the pad will last for years. For more information on ELayers go to [www.sportssurfacesolutions.com](http://www.sportssurfacesolutions.com)



New to the UK is the portable Ultra Base System, as pioneered by the European Turf Group. Designed as a tile that clips together, the UBS removes nearly all the construction needed on a new build and accelerates a pitch build by weeks. For more information on Ultra Base Systems got to [www.europeanturfgroup.com](http://www.europeanturfgroup.com)



# New Sports hit UK market



Whilst Olympic fever is growing and the Euros keep football at the front of mind, there are two sports rising in popularity, quietly in the background. Padel and Touch are names that don't mean much to the average person, but if the success these sports have had in

Spain and Australia respectively, are replicated in the UK then our sporting landscape could change.

## Padel

Back in the late 90s Spanish tennis was in the doldrums, with over 1 million players lost to the game and clubs going out of business. Yet 15 years later tennis is still alive and clubs are booming. In many cases this is all down to the growth of Padel. For those who do not know this game, I suggest a quick look on YouTube will get you hooked. A cross between short tennis and squash, and played on short pile synthetic grass, the game is the perfect competitive workout for experienced tennis players and, more importantly, those who are not tennis players. In fact with over 2.5 million Padel players in Spain, more than who play tennis, the sport is second only to football in popularity.

Back in the UK Padel is very new. Last year Huddersfield TC installed two outdoor courts and three indoor courts were installed at the David Lloyd Club in Chigwell. More courts will be installed at other David Lloyd Clubs this summer. Initial reactions have been positive. Many users are familiar with the game through trying it out whilst on holiday, and others are finding it an easy sport to pick up.

But it has yet to take off with tennis clubs in the same way as in Spain, and it may find its UK home more around sports and fitness clubs. The ideal number to start with is 3 courts and the cost for these will be around £100,000. In Spain a club would earn income from



bookings to pay for the cost of these courts in less than two years, making the Padel court a very nice little earner moving forward.

For more information on Padel in the UK visit [www.totalpadel.co.uk](http://www.totalpadel.co.uk)

## Touch

For years rugby players have played touch at training and during summer breaks, and the RFU has actively promoted Tag at primary schools and rugby clubs as the way for youngsters to enter the sport. Down under the Aussies have taken this a stage further and developed a game now played by over 500,000 players, young and old, male and female, making it second only to football in participation numbers. Yes, more people play Touch in Australia than rugby union, rugby league, Aussie Rules and cricket.



Action from England Men's Open draw with South Africa at last year's Touch World Cup.

The game is growing fast in the UK with Scotland hosting last years' world cup, where nearly all categories were won by Australia, in finals against local rivals New Zealand. This year's Euro Championship is being held in Italy and will be competed for in Men's, Women's and Mixed Open and age group categories.

Touch is played across the width of a rugby field, and two full size pitches can be accommodated on one synthetic turf 3G pitch. And for rugby clubs wishing to raise money from a synthetic turf training pitch, the new Rhino Park concept is designed around a full size Touch pitch. For more information go to [www.rhino-turf.com](http://www.rhino-turf.com) and visit [www.englandtouch.org.uk](http://www.englandtouch.org.uk)



# Coming next newsletter

- \* The Turf Muncher arrives... The first Turf Muncher in Europe is set to lift the pitch at Westway ready for reuse, with infill materials sent for recycling. See photos and hear how it works in detail.
- \* Latest market news with Rhino-Turf set to be installed at several sites
- \* Pitch surrounds achieve new levels
- \* CCGrass tennis courts arrive in the UK
- \* Maintenance the right way



The Turf Muncher in action

