

# *Turf Solutions*

## Pitch Perfect – The Total Solution

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Professional football today is big business, and groundsmen are under increasing pressure to provide a pitch which not only looks superb, but is also hardwearing, tolerant to all sorts of conditions and, of course, which plays like a dream. Producing a pitch like this involves numerous factors, but the key to success is ensuring good turf nutrition is in place right at the very start.

Leading fertilizer company Scotts specialises in not only providing product, but working closely with a whole range of customers – including soccer clubs – to plan detailed, tailor-made nutritional programmes that will keep the turf looking its best long term.

The Scotts range of products is designed to provide the perfect maintenance solution for all turf surfaces. Rather than just recommending a standard fertiliser program Scotts areas sales managers consider a number of options before making a specific recommendation for each site. In addition to a detailed soil analysis other factors will be considered such as root zone type, grass species, number of games played, effects of the surrounding stadium etc. Once all this information has been considered Scotts are able to recommend the ideal nutritional input program, other products such as fungicides, soil conditioners and wetting agents can also be recommended at this stage. The addition of Sierrablen controlled release fertiliser within the overall nutritional programme has been particularly successful at many high profile clubs throughout the country. This product releases nutrient slowly over a period of time to match the natural growth pattern of the grass plant. This helps to create strongly rooted plants without excess foliage growth. The overall effect is a harder wearing and better looking turf throughout the playing season.

Here we look at how Scotts has helped three high-profile clubs to solve very different problems.

### **Ipswich Town Football Club**

Like many top soccer clubs these days, Ipswich Town has become a multi-purpose venue, and events such as rock concerts are a regular feature at Portman Road. The grounds team work hard to minimise the resulting leaf and root zone damage on the pitch, but the club decided they would have to invest in a new pitch to ensure the best possible surface for its main business – football – given the short window between concerts ending and football restarting.

Head groundsman Alan Ferguson explains: “We commissioned Support In Sport and Sovereign Turf, in Woodbridge, to grow a new ryegrass pitch for us and we wanted it to be an exact replica of our existing pitch, for continuity. Simon Barnaby put together a complete programme to ensure nutrition was spot on while the pitch was growing at the turf farm.



*Growing success*

“A pre-seed fertilizer was applied before the grass was sown in May 2004. Then we used Sierrablen and Greenmaster fertilizers up until June 2005. This gave the leaf and roots a real boost while it was growing. Scotts also developed a stress relief programme so the sward didn't suffer when it was cut and moved to the stadium.”

In addition to the fertiliser programme (including higher phosphate and potassium products), the stress relieve program consisted of an application of Scotts unique fungicide – Heritage and Scotts Greenmaster Blade soil conditioner which has been proven in extensive research to increase rooting by up to 4 times.

In July, the new pitch was cut and laid at the main stadium in only 42 hours, and just five days later it was playing host to a fixture against Rangers. “We prepared the new site with a PS5 fertilizer onto the root zone, then we laid the turf on top,” Alan adds. “After this, Greenmaster 14+0+10 zero Phosphate fertilizer was applied. The combination of these products fed the roots and encouraged fast establishment in the new environment. The new pitch performed superbly for the Rangers game. It was healthy, strong and everyone was delighted with the quality.”

### **Coventry City Football Club**

Building a new £113 million, 32,500 seater stadium is quite a tall order, but Coventry City Football Club has done just that with its new Ricoh Arena Coventry complex.

The fantastic-looking pitch at the heart of the new home of the Sky Blues is in no small way due to Coventry's long-time association with Scotts, who ensured the turf had the best possible start and also developed a long term growing programme.

“Scotts has worked with us for about six years now,” says grounds manager Michael Finch. “They provide soil analysis and advice and we've used their Greenmaster and Sierrablen Fine fertilizers on both the Highfield Road pitch and the training ground at Ryton, with great results. We brought Scotts in to develop the new stadium pitch and used the same products here too, plus Greenmaster Blade. The pitch at the new arena looked superb from the very first match played.”

“The technology of fertilizers is quite sophisticated these days. Scotts puts a lot into research and development and really look after us. What we receive from them is a total solution, not just products, but also a scientific approach and the best expert advice.”

### **Brighton & Hove Albion Football Club**

Brighton & Hove Albion Football Club has used a range of Scotts fertilizers on its newly renovated pitch, and seen results that have impressed players and managers alike.

In May 2005, the Coca Cola Championship League club – which uses Withdean Stadium in Brighton as its temporary home ground – began a complete surface renovation of the pitch, mainly to help control the ingress of annual meadowgrass (*Poa annua*), which can become a common problem on pitches if left unchecked.

This entailed the removal of the surface to approximately half an inch in depth over the entire pitch, inserting sand slits to help with drainage, top dressing the pitch with a suitable pure sand material, then re-seeding with Barenbrug BAR 7 and BAR Stadia grass seed.



*Growing success*

At this stage, Scotts nutrient was applied. Head groundsman Steve Winterburn explains how the product selection was made. "In order to establish precisely the right nutrient application needed to give the seed the best start, Scotts did a complete soil analysis for me," he says, "arranged through their distributor Avoncrop Amenity."

The soil analysis revealed which nutrient input was needed; Scotts Sportsmaster PS5 with a Nitrogen, Phosphate, Potash ratio of 8+12+8 plus two per cent magnesium. This was a perfect choice to help develop strong, fast growth on the newly seeded pitch."

The pitch was then covered with breathable germination sheets to keep the soil warm while retaining moisture. "Germination started to occur in only five days," says Steve, "which is very impressive. The germination sheets came off in week two, and the grounds staff began mowing in week three. One month later the pitch was in use for the start of the athletics season.

"The PS5 product was used again in the Summer to really push on establishment. I'm now specifying Sierraform 18+9+18 to be applied – a slow release product designed for sand-based soils, which will help provide nutrition to the pitch as it matures."

The first football match was played in early August and, says Steve, the appearance and playability of the pitch has been tremendous. "The manager and players from both Brighton and the away teams have been very complementary indeed, and the referees have also marked us up on pitch quality. My grounds staff has noticed an increase in the strength of the sward when reinstating the surface after matches. I'm delighted with the results.

"There's no doubt that Scotts fertilizers have played a large part in the success of the new surface. They have a wide range of products, and forms of nutrients available, which make it easy to tailor something to your needs. And the soil testing enabled us to select precisely the right nutrient.

"The plan is for a new stadium to be built in the City of Brighton & Hove as a permanent home for the club, hopefully within the next couple of years. If it goes ahead I would be certainly work with Scotts at our new stadium."



*Growing success*