

THE FIH SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

Thanks for inviting me to speak to you regarding the FIH SYSTEM. I have been looking forward to being here for some time.

FIH -

As you no doubt know, FIH went through a reorganization, a sort of streamlining or downsizing, at the end of 2001. The changes are basically all positive although we are still working out some kinks and will no doubt make a few more modifications at the Congress this December in Perth.

Equipment Committee

The Equipment Committee which I Chair is relatively small consisting of 10 individuals. There is, however, a lot of expertise as well as representation from both genders and all continents.

Aim

As a Committee our Aim is: *To act as the Centre of Expertise within the FIH for performance and design standards of equipment and facilities used for hockey matches and/or hockey training, both outdoor and indoor. To serve as the contact between manufacturers and suppliers of hockey equipment and facilities as well as with FIH accredited test laboratories.*

Today

I think today's presentation might better be called the FIH Synthetic Turf System for that's really my focus. My intent is to give you an overview as to what we do and the challenges we face doing it. Please feel free to stop me anytime if you have any questions. First of all, however, to properly set the stage for dealing with the challenges we all face, an historic overview is most appropriate.

History

As you no doubt know - for hockey, using synthetic turf regularly only became a reality after the Montreal Olympics in 1976. I'm always reminded of that event as it was when Ed Milner and I first became acquainted. We've been friends ever since and have jointly experienced a number of what I will call synthetic challenges.

Technical Concerns

Initially of course for the Hockey World synthetic turf presented a lot of new considerations including the expected cost comparisons with natural grass and coming to terms with maintenance, installation concerns, costs and options.

Athletes Concerns

Then, from an athlete's perspective, there were ball performance concerns, questions about underfoot friction, proper foot wear and much more. In summary there was a major learning curve for the Hockey World. Sometimes I think we're still on that learning curve although it fortunately is not quite so steep these days.

Market Place

Simply put, this is where we do business, where there are and where there could be synthetic hockey pitches.

Size

Montreal marked the opening of a large new market place for the hockey equipment industry. Currently with over 110 FIH members, field hockey is the most widely played outdoor team sport in the world after football even though its teams are strictly amateur.

Olympics

Field Hockey is also a long time Olympic Sport having first appeared on „the 5 Ring Circuit“ in 1908 in London. Now, with a first Indoor World Cup scheduled for Leipzig in early February, hockey will have an even greater year round global presence.

Global Impact

The introduction of synthetic pitches for hockey clearly had a global impact on the game. Longer seasons became standard while the uniformity of playing surfaces provided for the universal development of playing skills as field hockey would now be played on similar surfaces throughout the world. No longer would there be an Asian advantage for skills developed on hard playing surfaces or disadvantages elsewhere because of seasonally wet and/or muddy surfaces. There would be no more rain-outs, although we all prudently duck for cover in the face of lightening.

Development

The availability of synthetic surfaces has also been helpful for the development of hockey in smaller countries throughout the world.

IOC

Let me digress for a moment to note the support FIH receives from the IOC for hockey development.. The IOC has been contributing financially on a matching grant basis towards the cost of installing two synthetic hockey pitches annually for a number of years in some of the smaller or less wealthy hockey countries of the world. Some of those beneficiaries are: Mexico, Malta, Cuba, Nigeria, Fiji, Lithuania, Macao and others. Let us hope that program continues.

Synthetic Requirement

By the time of the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, playing on synthetic surfaces was becoming a standard for top level competitive hockey in Europe and for major events everywhere. As a Pan Am official I can tell you that 1983 in Caracas was the last time the Pan Am Games would be played on grass. It has been on artificial turf ever since. The same is true for World Cups, Continental Cups, Champions Trophy's etc. etc. Furthermore with proper lighting, one synthetic pitch could theoretically be played upon for 24 hours a day non stop.

Fewer Pitches needed for Tournaments

The bottom line was: „fewer pitches were now needed to host a tournament“. For major tournaments there would also be a synthetic warm up pitch or pitches. This meant and still means a growing number of installations, a very positive impact on the market place. Also there is such a thing as „pitch life“. This leads to the very active replacement pitch market. Although cost was and still is a major consideration, end-users were generally becoming more knowledgeable in their decision making and support for synthetic hockey pitches.

STANDARDS

Field Tests

Let us talk about standards for, as a result of all this development and change in the hockey picture from natural to synthetic surfaces, FIH was setting standards and accrediting labs to test products for those standards. Installation field testing was also being developed. Chargeable to the end user, field tests were important for if an approved product were not installed properly the end result could be very negative. The aim of this testing was competitive uniformity throughout the hockey world. By using the same rules and having verified playing standards everyone was playing the same game. We don't care who makes a product as long as the standards are met.

Different Levels

After a period of time, separate standards were developed for different levels of play. With cost ramifications as part of the mix these levels are: „Starter“, „Standard“ and „Global“. Hockey after all is not just a sport for elite, ie Olympic, and top level athletes. It is a sport that is also concerned with development. There are schools, universities, clubs and communities throughout the world that share this concern. Recreational players feel the same way. Interestingly FIH has just concluded a very successful *Year of the Youth Program*, a comprehensive effort for young hockey players in all continents.

Different Products

Pitch Surfaces used to meet the standards are variable and include 3 types: filled, unfilled and dressed. All products, however, are not approved for all levels of play. „Wet pitches“ are another important requirement for different products.

Tests

The variety of tests used for performance testing and accreditation include such things as: ball roll, ball rebound, pile/pad deformation, underfoot friction, ball-to-surface friction, impact response, pitch porosity, surface color, surface gloss, pitch smoothness etc. Decisions to select a product could be affected by cost, the availability of materials and water as well as the planned level of play.

LABS

Obviously required testing has to be done by neutral FIH approved/accredited labs. At this point in time FIH has 6 Accredited Labs. Although the market place is not huge all the labs work hard to support hockey and help with the development of new specifications, research new materials, investigate new ideas and answer questions. Obviously the FIH Equipment Committee and Hockey Rules Board (HRB) have the final say regarding any changes. Labs may also get involved with testing and standards for other hockey products such as sticks, balls and protective gear.

New Labs

In response to a question that has been raised about accrediting new labs, FIH lawyers have recently stated that to restrict the number of qualified labs would be a „Restraint of Trade“. This will no doubt mean additional new labs. The market place, as in so many business situations, will become the ultimate arbitrator for success.

Geographic Needs

Meanwhile we do have one real lab concern as all the current labs are located in Europe, Japan or Australia meaning there are none in Africa, the Americas or Central Asia. Therefore if Argentina, a hockey power for men and women, wanted to have a new field in, let us say Patagonia, tested, they would have to, in addition to standard testing charges, pay for experts to fly in from another continent to conduct the tests. This is a high price to pay in today's Argentine economy or any economy for that matter. What's the answer? Unfortunately one answer is „Don't Test“. A more positive approach is encouraging new labs to locate in the Americas, Africa or Asia. This topic, among others, will be on the agenda when the FIH Accredited Labs meet in Perth during the Women's WC later this year. By the way my latest intelligence indicates one of our accredited labs has opened a branch in Montreal. What this might mean for the Americas is as yet unknown.

Sub Base

As we near the end of the third decade since Montreal, the challenges and choices are greater than ever. There is a strong feeling that the focus for new installations should now be on the sub base rather than the actual playing surface. This focus would include such things as drainage, levelness, slope, shock pads, etc.

Litigation

Like most sports these days field hockey has to face threats of litigation.. What once was thought to be just part of playing sports now has to be thought of in terms of potential equipment oriented injuries.

One of my chief speakers at a North American Equipment Manufacturers Seminar a few years ago was Ed Milner speaking on Sports Liability. It's a subject that can't be dismissed.

Communications

Education

One of today's major challenges is educating Decision Makers and the folks with the check books re hockey's needs in understandable non technical terms. This might include an explanation as to the need for a new or replacement pitch, why an irrigation system is required or what is the value of field testing etc.etc. These Decision Makers also need to understand the different levels of play, the different products available and what's required as well as what's not required.

Manuals

To help communicate with Decision Makers and Pitch Managers, the Equipment Committee provides a number of manuals. Already there are: *The Handbook of Performance Requirements – Synthetic Hockey Pitches - Outdoor* (to be updated in 2003), *The Guide to the Artificial Lighting of Hockey Pitches* and by year's end an *Irrigation Manual* and a *Pitch Maintenance Manual*. . We are also investigating the possible production of a special non technical Synthetic Pitch Pamphlet to help educate the Decision Maker. It will likely be similar in many respects to a manual produced by Field Hockey Canada a few years ago titled *Synthetic Surfaces*.

Web Site

From an equipment perspective the object of the FIH Web site is to have available all relevant information such as manuals, lists of approved manufacturers and accredited labs, FIH Equipment Committee names and, in 2003, a section titled „*Most Frequently Asked Questions*“.

Currently the principal web site problem is design. Downloading the older manuals with their many pictures and diagrams is too time consuming . This problem is being addressed. As an aside I should also note that this concern has lead to delays in completing the newest manuals.

Athletes Test Panel

Sports decision makers generally like to feel they are in touch with athletes at all levels and organizations such as the IOC require the inclusion of athletes on Committees as does FIH. With this in mind we, the FIH Equipment Committee, will be investigating the possibility of creating *Athletes Panels* to help with testing. They would be formed in different geographic areas and provide opinions on new products. The practicalities and details for this approach will ultimately be worked out with the registered manufacturers and of course the FIH Executive Board.

Current Challenges

Long Pile Pitches - Skills

Over the last few years a long pile filled pitch product simulating natural grass has emerged and received

approval from FIFA and UEFA, an important achievement as football accounts for at least 80% of the new synthetic pitch market. Hockey, on the other hand, is only played on long pile surfaces when there are no alternatives and then only at lower levels of play. I like to explain hockey's concern about this type of pitch to non hockey Decision Makers by equating it to playing golf with one club - a putter. One would have problems on fairways but none on the greens. Because of the slow ball roll, hockey skills and the development of those skills are diminished and possibly lost by playing on long pile surfaces.

Long Pile Pitches - Danger

There is also a potential danger on long pile pitches from unintentionally raised balls. Playing in a veterans tournament last November in Vancouver on this type of surface. I saw one very bad injury to a former Canadian National female player when struck in the eye by an unintentionally raised ball.

Multi Purpose Pitches

Unfortunately for hockey the less costly Long-Pile product is considered very suitable for multi-purpose installations, the sort found within academic and municipal circles where pitches must be shared by different sports such as lacrosse, soccer, American football and rugby to name a few. All sports but hockey seem to like the long pile. Now, however, after saying that I would like to report a new exception..

CAC Games

This years' quadrennial CAC (Central American and Caribbean Games) Games are scheduled for late November . They will be hosted by El Salvador, a non hockey country. A year ago alternate sites were found for a number of sports including hockey. The CAC site selected for hockey was Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico had a turf in San Juan but it needed to be replaced and they committed to having the replacement done. Then for last minute financial and political reasons, although there still will be a replacement, Puerto Rico couldn't get the pitch installed in time for the CAC Games. As a result their National Olympic Committee, a few weeks ago, announced that the CAC Hockey Tournament was cancelled. This resulted in a great hue and cry in the PAHF (Pan American Hockey Federation) of which I am a Director. There was an urgent determination to find an alternative and one was quickly found meaning the CAC hockey tournament will now definitely be held in Puerto Rico. The interesting news is that it will be played in a baseball stadium. where apparently there is sufficient synthetic turf in the outfield for a hockey pitch.. Harry Salomons of AstroTurf, who is here today, can fill you in with the details as he was and still is involved with this saga.

Meetings in Perth

FIH is aware of all these concerns and is looking for answers collectively with manufacturers. A couple of the avenues to be explored are *dressed pitches* and *new pile length pitches*. All these concerns and approaches will be discussed along with other issues at the meeting of Synthetic Hockey Turf Manufacturers in Perth this November during the Women's World Cup.

Conclusions

By accepting FIH, the FIH Approved Pitch Manufacturers and FIH Accredited Labs as Business Partners I suggest the following new objectives.: Work Together Regularly, Communicate More Frequently, Organizing More Seminars and always Do What's Best For Field Hockey. By the way if you forgot to ask me any question today, tune into the FIH Web Site and get the answers, if not tomorrow, definitely in 2003. Thanks again for letting me join you here in Nyon.