

Pitch Well Laid Out: Eric

by S S Shreekumar

Bangalore: Dr Eric Harrison, Consultant and Technical Expert of the FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turfs, has a simple approach: Give me a good pitch and I will give you good players.

With this in mind, Eric, a former footballer himself who specialised in synthetic surface matters later, has toured many parts of the world as FIFA has financed the laying of synthetic pitches in many countries. "If you have a good playing surface, the quality of your performance improves.

The skill levels can always be higher if you can control the ball better. That's why, wherever possible the installation of synthetic pitches are being taken up," said Eric, who inspected the newly-laid synthetic surface in Bangalore.

"FIFA is committed to developing more soccer grounds with artificial turf in India. We have similar projects in Shillong, Imphal and Mumbai and hope to develop such grounds in Calcutta and Goa," Eric said.

"The normal life span of a synthetic surface is between eight and 10 years if used for about 40 to 45 hours per week," he opined.

Asked why a natural sur-



Eric Harrison (second from left) inspects the newly-laid synthetic surface in Bangalore on Wednesday

face should not be used then, Eric said: "A perfectly laid natural grass surface is always ideal but it cannot be achieved easily. It is far more difficult to do that in comparison to such a surface," said Eric.

Was he satisfied with the surface? "Well, yes, it has been laid beautifully. The base and the density of synthetic grass is good. But I am not the final authority to certify it. A FIFA technical testing team will come down

sometime later and will conduct tests before certifying it," Eric hastened to add.

"The FIFA quality concept for such turf is a rigorous testing programme. The objectives of this includes creation of recognised standards, ensuring global consistency and increase product quality around the world," added Eric.

"Basically, all the criteria and tests have been devised by us using grass as the bench mark so that ball be-

haviour on the artificial turf matches ball behaviour on a good grass surface," he said.

"Qualifying matches for FIFA final competitions may be played on artificial surfaces provided FIFA permission is requested two months prior to the game. And the next decade will surely see the installation of an increasing number of artificial pitches in club football stadia throughout the world," he added.

Asked why many nations, specially in Europe, have rejected them, Eric said: "Yes some may have, but many haven't."

"Many top clubs use them for training purposes because it requires less maintenance. But then it must be watered specially when the temperatures are high. Those who do not want them, have the resources to lay near-perfect natural surfaces," he added.

Asked about carpet burns that players suffer, Eric said "if the surface is what it is here, I don't think that would be the case."

When informed that there were complaints from players about the surface in Kolkata, Eric said: "That surface was not laid by FIFA. I don't know about the surface there."