



European Synthetic  
Turf Organisation

# **ESTO REPORT: GERMAN FOOTBALL STRATEGY**

**AND THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF SYNTHETIC TURF:  
A BLUEPRINT FOR FOOTBALL ASSOCIATIONS TO CONSIDER  
SYNTHETIC TURF AS A LONG TERM DEVELOPMENT AND  
PERFORMANCE STRATEGY.**



# BACKGROUND ON THE GERMAN FOOTBALL STRATEGY

Germany lifting the World Cup this summer was the product of over a decade of careful planning and innovation by the DFB (German Football Association). It all began with an embarrassing performance in the World Cup 1998, with a 3:0 loss to Croatia in the quarter-final, and then at the Euro 2000, when the “Mannschaft” failed to go through the group stages and finished last in their group. Immediately following this disappointing Euro 2000, the country decided that the only way to redeem themselves and regain their top level was to tackle the problem from the bottom-up and therefore focused on the developing the game at grass roots level.

The upshot of unsatisfactory results in international competitions was that the DFB decided to invest all their time and resources in the development of young talent by improving accessibility and by focusing on a technical and tactical approach. Therefore, in 2001, the first compulsory requirement the DFB imposed on all 36 clubs in the 1st and 2nd German divisions was the integration of youth academies within the structure of the clubs. Then from 2002/2003 onwards, The German football association started implementing football bases all over the country, with the aim to allow every player access to the best coaching.

At the moment, there are 366 of these DFB bases throughout Germany (see map on the right), and are thus within easy reach of all players. In addition, being a super talent or part of Bayern Munich's academy is not an essential requirement in order to be invited to the first level of additional coaching at the DFB bases. The mantra here is every talented player should have the opportunity, outside of his own club, to take part in more advanced and professional training. These training centres are usually aimed at the 11-14 age group. Not every player in that age group is fortunate enough to play in the academy of a professional club.

Thus, if he is good enough, these DFB bases offer such potentially good players the opportunity to train at a more challenging level. The main idea is to ensure that players who, up to that point, had not yet been spotted by scouts from professional clubs, are still able to improve and attain peak performance.



In order to ensure the required standard of coaching, only coaches with at least an UEFA B-licence, are put in charge of coaching in these DFB bases. Therefore the creation of these training centres has also resulted in the increase number of qualified coaches. Currently, around 1000 people are employed as coaches and the appraisal of players to ensure best possible conditions for the players. These bases raise the general standard of quality outside of the academies, and maintain a more realistic approach. According to UEFA, Germany is one of the countries, if not the only country, with the most UEFA-qualified licensed coaches. It has 28,400 coaches with the B licence, 5,500 with the A licence and 1,070 with the Pro licence, the highest qualification.

# CASE STUDY – 1000 SYNTHETIC MINI PITCHES

After doing reasonably well in the 2002 (reached the final) and 2006 (finished 3rd) the DFB clearly saw that focusing on the development at the very bottom of the chain (grassroots) would result in positive change. Thus, the DFB then decided to focus solely on the aspects of accessibility and participation.

In 2007, the German Football Association (DFB) resolved that the time had come to promote football actively as a school sport and widen its general appeal. Playing the game would lead to improved integration amongst children and youths. Boys and girls of all ages and sizes, indigenous and immigrant kids all kicking a ball together, getting to know each other better. Therefore the DFB decided to install 1'000 synthetic mini-pitches in Germany financed by income from the 2006 World Cup and UEFA affiliates with their Hattrick programme. The DFB alone invested 25 million euros which accounts for the biggest single investment in DFB history. Over 4,000 schools and clubs applied for DFB grants.

The German Football Association covered the cost of the entire playing area, with the exception of any additional groundwork preparation, thus presenting a wonderful opportunity to extend schools' long-term portfolio in a meaningful way. One thousand Mini Pitches were initially planned, 1'006 were ultimately completed. Distributed equally among Germany's 21 regional football associations, coverage is excellent in the whole of the country (please see maps below). Virtually every child in the land will find a football pitch close by.

## Football Association Württemberg

76 Minipitches



## Football Association Bavaria

153 Minipitches



# CASE STUDY – 1000 SYNTHETIC MINI PITCHES

## BENEFITS OF THESE SYNTHETIC MINI PITCHES

Previous research clearly shows that infrastructures are key to the development of the game. In order to improve the quality and quantity of football within a country, the number of playing surfaces must increase. Smaller-dimensioned pitches are cheaper to install and operate than full-sized surfaces, making them a cost-effective solution to the demand for football facilities. Several mini pitches can often be installed for the same cost as a single full-sized pitch. More importantly these mini pitches offer accessibility as they can be installed in various different kinds of settings i.e. school playground, national and regional technical centres, built-up urban areas (e.g. rooftops), club training grounds, company recreational grounds, parks and municipality facilities.

### BENEFITS TO PLAYERS

Small-sided football played on synthetic turf benefits the technical development of players of all levels and ages, from grassroots and recreational participation to advanced elite development. In particular, the mini pitches provide younger age groups with a good environment in which to enjoy the game and develop their skills. They are ideal for learning and training: by taking part in practice drills, routines and games on mini pitches, players will develop skills that can be applied in matches on a full-size pitch. Players are more involved in the game, both in attacking and defensive situations, in smaller-sided games. This intensive involvement is key to learning the game and developing technique.

Below are a few facts which indicate/demonstrate how playing football on these mini pitches can help in the technical development of young players:

- Players touch the ball five times more often in 4 v 4 matches and 50% more in 7 v 7 matches.
- Players are involved in one-on-one encounters three times more often in 4 v 4 matches and twice as often in 7 v 7 matches.
- Players are more likely to score, with goals scored on average every two minutes in 4 v 4 matches and every four minutes in 7 v 7 matches.
- Goalkeepers are called into action between two and four times more often in 7 v 7 matches than they are in 11 v 11 matches.
- The ball is out of play 8% of the time in 4 v 4 matches, 14% of the time in 7 v 7 matches and 34% of the time in 11 v 11 matches

### SUPPORTING PARTICIPATION GROWTH THROUGH MINI PITCHES

Mini pitches can have a positive impact on recreational participation, giving more players within all grassroots categories the opportunity to play the game. They support informal play, making the game accessible to more groups. There are several reasons for this. First of all, fewer players are required: it is easier to gather eight or ten players for a small-sided match than 22 for a full-sized game. Secondly, they are less intimidating for players with inferior levels of fitness and also offer a safe environment to play in.

As well as promoting general participation, the removal of these barriers to participation helps make football accessible to key target groups, including younger age groups and girls and therefore increase the chances of producing top world-class football players.

To recapitulate, it is evident from the above that the strategy adopted by the DFB following their inadequate performance was not only highly effective but also extremely productive as it led to their achieving the ultimate and well-deserved reward of winning the World Cup.

The challenge facing them now of course will be that of retaining the title, which may well lead to the continuation and expansion of their policy of making football easily accessible to all as it has already led them to the pinnacle of success in the world of international competition.

In conclusion it is evident that a robust facilities strategy focussing on synthetic turf is a contributor to performance at the highest level. This strategic approach must be applauded by the German Football Association and hopefully a blueprint for other football associations to follow in principle.

# REFERENCES

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