



European Synthetic
Turf Organisation

**A SURVEY OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL
COACHES IN EUROPE ON THEIR VIEWS
OF PRACTICING AND PLAYING ON
SYNTHETIC TURF**

CONTENTS

- 3 Introduction
- 4 Executive Summary
- 5 Review of Previous Research
- 6 Research Results
- 9 Analysis of Data: Major Findings
- 10 Quotes from Coaches
- 11 Why are the views of coaches important for the Synthetic Turf Industry?
- 12 Appendix 1: Responding Associations to the Online Survey

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Terms of Reference

- » This Report seeks to focus upon the views of practicing football coaches on the use of synthetic turf for playing and practicing football
- » Europe is defined as the members of the 'Alliance of European Football Coaches' Associations'

1.2. Research Methodologies

The following methods were used:

A Review of Previous Research

- » The only previous research in this area was conducted by ESTO in 2013 with 110 members of the Dutch Professional Football Coaches Association: <http://www.theesto.com/esto-publications/esto-and-coaches-bv>
- » There have been occasional media references to the views of individual coaches e.g. <http://www.theguardian.com/football/2015/may/21/in-defense-of-artificial-turf-why-its-time-to-destigmatize-plastic-pitches> where the author claims 'Many coaches believe that for teaching the sport's fundamentals an artificial pitch is best' but without providing any evidence

Original Research

- » An email with a link to an online questionnaire was sent to the General Secretaries of the members of the Alliance of European Football Coaches' Associations' (AEFCA)
- » The online questionnaire used the constant contact software tool (www.constantcontact.com)
- » The email and survey were provided in English and where appropriate translated into French, Spanish, German, Italian and Russian
- » The list of respondents on behalf of their National Football Federations is enclosed in Appendix I which represent approximately 40 % of the membership of the AEFCA
- » Over 2,000 practicing coaches responded to the questionnaire

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a report of the first European Wide Research on the views of practicing football coaches with regard to using synthetic surfaces for training and playing games.

In the on-going discussion about the value of Synthetic Turf, the opinions of Coaches have seldom been heard. ESTO would like to address this situation and this Report reflects the responses from over 2,000 coaches in Europe from 40% of The Coaches Association in Europe.

The European Synthetic Turf Organisation would wish to record their thanks to the General Secretaries and the Members of the Coaches Association (listed in Appendix 1) who responded to the online survey: their assistance is most appreciated.

It is a testament to the professionalism of those completing this survey that in total the respondents provided over 10,000 individual comments!

The majority of responses are from paid professional coaches – full time and part time; coaches of male and female players ; coaches of senior and young players. More coaches get paid for coaching youngsters than for senior players .They would consider themselves professional coaches even if not coaching professional players.

The coaches who completed the survey are members of their National Coaches Association. Membership of such Associations will require a fee and the coach will be expected to attend certain continuing training courses to be able to retain their National Association or UEFA Coaching Qualification.

Coaches who join a Coaches Association may or may not be paid for their coaching duties but their commitment and coaching service provided is increasingly 'Professional' –they are committed to professional development.

Furthermore quality coaches – at any level – emphasize 'Performance' over merely the result. This approach assists lifelong participation and excellence.

More and more coaches are experiencing coaching on synthetic surfaces (2/3rds of coaches in this Report sampled coach mainly on synthetic surfaces).

With greater access to synthetic turf fields attitudes appear to be changing in that 75% of coaches believe that players were likely to develop better skills by training on Synthetic Turf.

Practicing Coaches believe Synthetic Surfaces provide considerable benefits including avoiding the effects of the weather, helping the development of young players assisting in the development of technical skills.

Whilst opinions are almost evenly divided on whether all Competitive Football should be played on synthetic turf, over 2/3rds of all coaches who had experience of coaching teams which have played regular competitive football on synthetic turf fields believe that playing regular competitive football on synthetic turf improved skill acquisition for their players.

The overwhelming majority of coaches prefer to coach players on synthetic surfaces where they can also implement their coaching methods most effectively.



3. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The Major Findings from the only previous research in this area, conducted by ESTO in 2013 with 110 members of the Dutch Professional Football Coaches Association: <http://www.theesto.com/esto-publications/esto-and-coaches-bv> were as follows:

62% of coaches believed that: 'Players are able to develop better technical skills by training on synthetic turf'

57% of coaches said that 'Longer term, will players' techniques will be better developed by playing and training on synthetic turf'

70% of respondents claimed that: 'Training and playing on synthetic turf does improve skill acquisition amongst your players'

38% of coaches reported that they had to change the content of a coaching session based on the type or condition of a playing surface

31% of those who replied highlighted that 'Given the choice, they would you prefer to play all competitive matches on synthetic turf'

The majority of coaches 'agree' that they 'find it easier to implement their coaching methods on an artificial pitch'

Nearly 74% of coaches either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they 'would rather coach on a modern artificial pitch than a poor quality natural turf pitch'



4. RESEARCH RESULTS

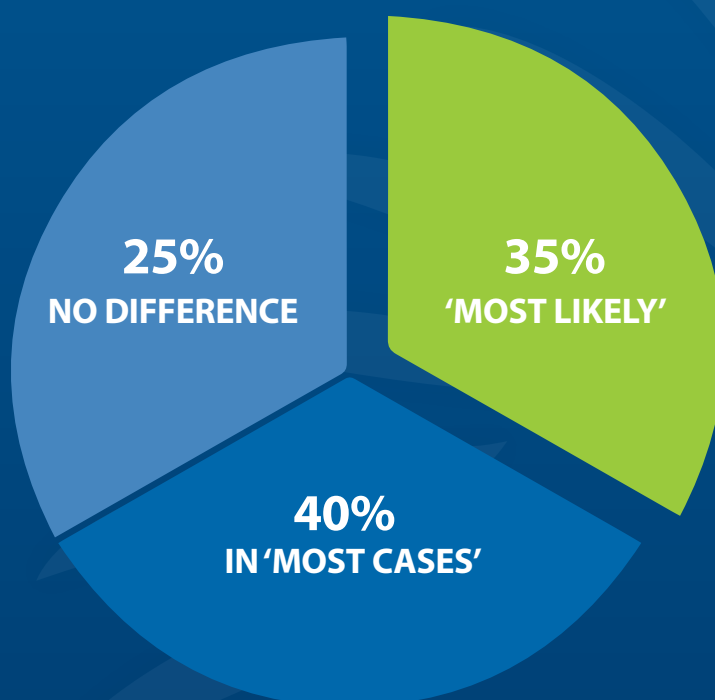
4.1 Can you please indicate below on which surfaces have you coached?

Main Grouping	Overall % of coaches	Highest Reported
Synthetic Turf most of the time	65%	84% (Norway) 81% (Eire and Scotland) 75% (Moldova)
Never on Natural Turf	<1%	
Never on Synthetic Turf	1%	

4.2. From your experience do you think players are more likely to be able to develop better technical skills by training on Synthetic turf?

- » 35% of all coaches replied that players are most likely to develop better technical skills and a further 40 % of coaches believed this to be ' in most cases ' on by training on Synthetic Turf'
- » Thus 75% of coaches polled believed that players were likely to develop better skills by training on Synthetic Turf.
- » In Norway and Lithuania over 80% of coaches believed this to be the case

Do you think players are more likely to be able to develop better technical skills by training on Synthetic turf ?



4.3. If you have coached players who have played regular competitive football on synthetic turf please how would you rank how playing on synthetic turf improved skill acquisition for these players?

Response by Coaches	% agree	Highest Reported
No experience of regular competition on synthetic turf	42%	England 46%
No perceived improvement reported	16%	
Definite improvement reported	42%	68% Eire 60% Iceland

Thus 72 % of coaches who had experienced regular competitive football on synthetic turf believed this to improve the skill acquisition of the players.

4.4. Given the choice, would you prefer to play all competitive matches on Synthetic turf?

YES: 40% (60% in Norway)

NO: 60%

4.5. Have you ever had to change the content of a coaching session based on the type or condition of a natural turf playing surface?

YES: 58% (100% in Moldova & 67% in Georgia)

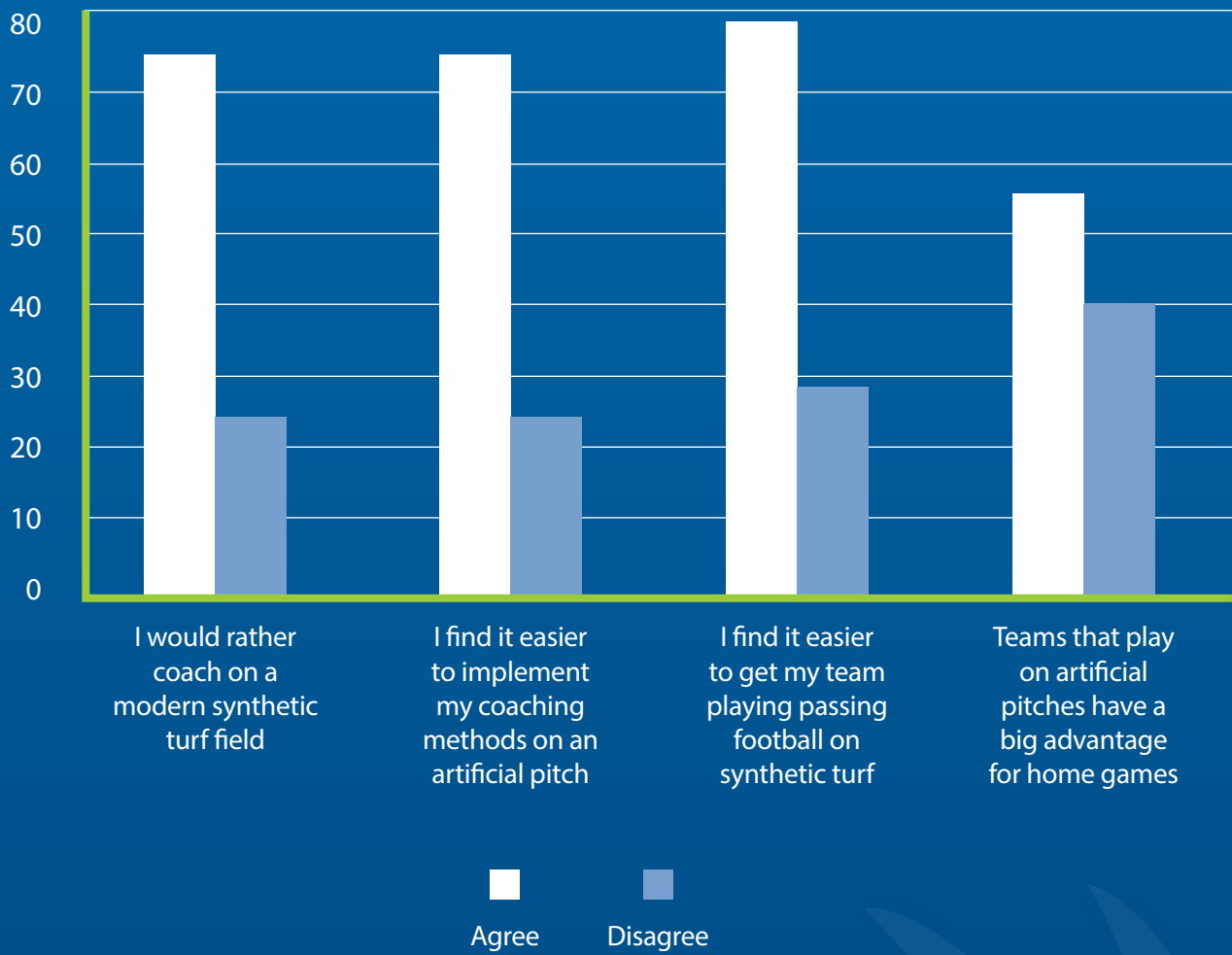
NO: 42%

4.6 What do you believe are the benefits of practicing and playing on synthetic turf?

Answers from coaches in Rank Order of Importance



4.7. Attitudes of Coaches to specific statements



5. ANALYSIS OF DATA: MAJOR FINDINGS

5.1. Experience of Synthetic Surfaces

- » 2/3rds of coaches sampled coach mainly on synthetic surfaces

5.2. Assistance in Skill Development

- » 75% of coaches believe that players were likely to develop better skills by training on Synthetic Turf. This is an increase of 18 percentage points on the survey of Dutch Coaches two years ago and a sign of increased acceptance of the value of synthetic surfaces in skill development.
- » Coaches regularly have to change the content of their practices if not on synthetic turf

5.3. Perceived Benefits of Synthetic Turf for using synthetic turf

- » Avoids effects of the weather
- » Helps the development of young players
- » Assists in the development of technical skills

5.4. The Use of Synthetic Turf in competitive football

- » Over 2/3rds of all coaches who had experience of coaching teams which have played regular competitive football on synthetic turf fields believe that playing regular competitive football on synthetic turf improved skill acquisition for their players
- » Opinions are almost evenly divided on whether all Competitive Football should be played on synthetic turf and whether teams that play their home games on synthetic turf have a big advantage

5.5. Attitudes of Coaches to Coaching on Synthetic Turf

- » The overwhelming majority of coaches prefer to coach players on synthetic surfaces where they can also implement their coaching methods most effectively

6. QUOTES BY COACHES WORKING IN 14 COUNTRIES TAKEN FROM OVER 10,000 COMMENTS MADE IN THE 2015 ESTO TECHNICAL REPORT

Scott Sellars, Coach Wolverhampton Wanderers FC and formerly Head of Coaching, Manchester City FC Academy, England

'Technically the players (at Manchester City) have improved by practicing on synthetic surfaces – also aided if indoor as more protected from wind and rain'

Paul Berg, Head of Player Development, Stabæk FC, Norwegian Top League

'Players' techniques in most cases will be better developed by training and playing on synthetic turf'

Rúnar Páll Sigmundsson, Head Coach, Stjarnan FC, 2014 Icelandic League Champions

'I find it easier to get my team playing passing football on synthetic turf'

Valdas Dambrauska, Coach FK Ekranas, Lithuanian Premier League

'I have noted a definite improvement in skill acquisition of players who have played regular competitive football on synthetic'

Paul Simpson, Assistant Coach, Newcastle United FC, England

'For training synthetic surfaces are much truer surface so players can concentrate on the ball and not worry about bobbles'

Willy Schmid, Instructor Swiss FA

'I would rather coach on a modern artificial field'

Gary Hunt, Coach, Tramore FC, Republic of Ireland

'Not being able to use the penalty areas or goal mouths therefore the lack of realism in training practices can occur. Being able to provide a phase of play practice (e.g. attack v defence) on synthetic turf that will occur on the area of the pitch you will use in game situations is therefore vital'

Teddy Moen, CEO of Norwegian Football Trainers Association

'Younger players actually prefer synthetic field and this boost their interest in training - good for skill acquisition'

Ghenadie Scurtul, Technical Director, Moldova Football Association

I find it easier to implement my coaching methods on an artificial pitch'

7. WHY ARE THE VIEWS OF FOOTBALL COACHES IMPORTANT FOR THE SYNTHETIC TURF INDUSTRY?

What Changes are taking place in Grassroots and Youth Football?

Throughout Europe the number of Grassroots Football clubs is decreasing but these clubs are growing with more teams and players. The greatest growth has been in providing football for youngsters (from 4 to 14 years of age), females of all ages and adults playing small sided versions of football.

The growth of football for youngsters has been led by the desire of parents for Safe, Socially and physically engaging healthy activity.

This in turn has led to an increased demand for qualified coaches who have experience in working with young players. Such coaches have become increasingly committed to the extent that this level of football has become 'professionalized'.

The increase in the size of Football Clubs, the growth of football 'camps', mini- games, skill tests, festivals have all contributed to the ' professionalism ' of Grassroots and Youth Football.

Furthermore in all aspects of grassroots, youth and adult football there is an ever increasing emphasis upon 'Performance'. This is clearly manifest in the provision of associated products: footballs, football boots and football apparel are now promoted for their performance value as well as their fashion status.

Who are the coaches?

Over 2,000 coaches completed the online questionnaire from 40% of the National Coaches Association for football coaches in: thus the largest, most comprehensive survey of professional football coaches in Europe to date.

It is a testament to the professionalism of those completing this survey that in total the respondents provided over 10,000 individual comments!

The coaches who completed the survey are members of their National Coaches Association.

Membership of such Associations will require a fee and the coach will be expected to attend certain continuing training courses to be able to retain their National Association or UEFA Coaching Qualification.

Coaches who join a Coaches Association may or may not be paid for their coaching duties but their commitment and coaching service provided is increasingly 'Professional' –they are committed to professional development.

Coaches join a Coaches Association therefore to develop as a coach and develop the players they coach.

Why are their views important?

The influence of the coach in a club is now more pronounced. Good coaches attract and retain players: they develop players to their potential. They emphasize 'Fun and Performance' over 'Winning' and produce players with lifelong participation.

Poor, inexperienced coaches with limited training alienate young players and their parents so that in the end the parents look for an alternative football club to join or an alternative sport.

To deliver their coaching skills committed, qualified coaches need to provide coaching and training sessions. This may be obvious but years ago coaches merely had to provide games and at most 'training' which was invariably only physical!

So qualified coaches who are members of a National Association want –and are indeed are obligated to –prepare, deliver and evaluate coaching sessions (often under the eyes of watchful parents) which are enjoyable, age appropriate, purposeful and progressive.

These coaches have the best interests of their players at heart. As professionals they want the best environment to provide enjoyable, deliberate, meaningful practice. It is not surprising therefore that the majority of such coaches would prefer to coach on synthetic turf.

The players they coach respect their views and therefore increasingly Clubs, Local government and Associations similarly respect the views of coaches

By supporting the use of synthetic turf football coaches will influence the attitudes of future generations of players, coaches, parents, officials and politicians

APPENDIX 1

Responses were provided by coaches from Associations in the following countries

- » Czech Republic
- » England
- » Faroe Islands
- » FYR Macedonia
- » Georgia
- » Iceland
- » Lithuania
- » Moldova
- » Northern Ireland
- » Norway
- » Republic of Ireland
- » Scotland
- » Switzerland
- » Slovakia
- » Wales



European Synthetic
Turf Organisation

**THE INDUSTRY'S TRADE AND
CONSUMER ORGANISATION**

6, Avenue E. Van Nieuwenhuyse
B - 1160 Brussels

T: +32 2 676 74 72

F: +32 2 676 74 74

www.theESTO.com