

WORLD CUP CULTIVAR OFFERS PROMISE FOR BRITAIN'S FOOTBALL CLUBS

Playing surfaces at the football world championship have drawn praise from players and turf specialists alike as talk turns to Brazil in 2014, when once again winter conditions will prevail during the FIFA World Cup.

But meantime, a new annual ryegrass cultivar, launched in South Africa and bred to provide fast repair of worn-out turf in colder conditions, is promising much for the UK football market.

England, although exiting early from South Africa, were among those complimenting stadium staff on the quality of the pitches, which were oversown with ryegrass to green them up ready for the tournament and the world's television viewing audience.

Organisers had their work cut out for them in preparing the more than 60 stadia and training pitches. The subtropical indigenous Kikuyu and Bermuda grasses lay dormant during the South African winter, which peaked during the month-long tournament.

The pitches were stripped and overseeded with temperate climate grasses, which thrive in cooler weather.

Dr Adriaan Schoeman was a member of the 2010 Local Organising Committee's pitch monitoring committee and is senior lecturer in Department of Zoology and Entomology, University of Pretoria.

For more than a year he was involved in the tournament build-up, visiting venue stadia and overseeing preparation and evaluation of playing surfaces. His verdict? "The pitches all performed well and FIFA is happy with them. They were better than those played on in Germany at the last World Cup in 2006.

"Based on the test here as well as the experiences during the 2010 World Cup, I'll be advising Brazil on which varieties to choose



for the tournament, which will be played in the southern hemisphere and in their winter."

Key among the suppliers for 2010 was DLF Trifolium. "As the main supplier of grass for the championship, we were acutely aware of the signals we received about the pitches," reports Derek Smith, DLF Trifolium's amenity sales manager. "Interest in the tournament was huge, with some 450,000 fans arriving from abroad, not forgetting the media glare."

Dozens of journalists followed fancied teams such as England, whose players had spoken highly of the stadia and training pitches. "They were very happy with the grass surfaces, which they felt had the correct combination of firmness and bounce to prevent most players from getting injured," adds Smith.

For many of the England squad, the surfaces were to some degree 'home from home' because DLF Trifolium supplies grass for the likes of Aston Villa, Chelsea and Manchester United.

"Several companies contested the bidding round," says Smith, "but after thorough studies and testing of many different grass varieties, DLF was selected as the major supplier. "Three of our turf varieties were selected: a smooth-stalked meadow grass, a perennial ryegrass and an annual ryegrass; Axcella. The seeds were shipped to individual stadia and the local turf managers seeded, watered, cared for and nurtured the grass pitches after careful instruction."

Nothing was left to chance - even the referees on duty at the championship had three football pitches made available to them, seeded with the same grass as all the other surfaces.

"Most of the pitches looked and played very well," adds Smith after the tournament ended. "I'm delighted with the results of the overseeding. Remember that the World Cup was played out of season in South Africa. Also, that for some of the venues, the starting point for pitch renovation was low.

"The brief as I understand it was to bring them to a peak for a limited period, in the



The indigenous Kikuyu grass is too hard for football world championship football during winter.

same way that grounds managers have to do for key sporting events here, such as Wimbledon and Queen's Club week.

He continues: "DLF markets the Johnsons Sport seed range in the UK and clubs can take advantage of the J Premier Pitch mixture tailored to deliver the same world-beating results for our UK market."

Key among the cultivars used in South Africa is Axcella. "Another innovation directly from the tournament is the introduction of J Rescue, which takes advantage of a new generation of annual ryegrass: Axcella. "The cultivar was used at the tournament to offer rapid green during their winter season."

Axcella is perfect for clubs that need to repair damage to the pitch late in the season, even into October and November, he adds, or for clubs looking to make a preventative winter overseeding.

The period from October to the end of February potentially can be a sticky period for grounds managers. If turf wears out, winter temperatures prevent effective overseeding until the following spring during season-end renovations. We have bred Axcella to get up and away when it's most wanted - during the heaviest period of use." **FSA**

For details of the complete Johnsons sport seed range contact your local distributor or Derek Smith on 01386 791102 or email amenity@dlf.co.uk

