



Artificial tees, as pictured, are now being more frequently used by golf clubs up and down the country.

ARTIFICIAL INFLUENCE

How important are artificial surfaces in golf and are they likely to play a bigger part?

Unlike sports such as football, rugby, hockey and use within Local Authority MUGA's (Multi Use Games Areas); golf has been rather slow off the mark to embrace fully artificial turf. However, all-weather golf tees, golf paths, putting greens, coverings to steps, ramps and bridges are slowly but surely being used up and down the country at various courses. All weather or high – wear lawn and landscape areas are also becoming increasingly used to enhance the clubs landscape from an aesthetic point of view.

"Golf has been slower than most sports to embrace the advantages of artificial grass due to it's liking of traditional methods and partly due to it's committee lead decision making processes," said Andrew Baylis, Managing Director of Kent based contractors, Active Leisure Contracts.

"Cheaper pay and play or pitch n putt courses where it is necessary to have facilities open all year round have been far quicker to embrace the practical and cost saving benefits of using artificial grass than the more established, traditional clubs," added Andrew.

All weather tees such as "Tee Turf" which is distributed exclusively in the UK by ALC has seen a significant increase in sales and installations within the last two to three years. "The product offers a solution to clubs/courses that suffer with heavy and/or wet courses that would normally mean closure during the wetter months; while also reducing maintenance costs and still providing a tee which is popular with the clubs members and players.

The time and cost savings allow more effort to be directed towards the greens, fairways and the general landscape aesthetics of the course. The development of more natural looking, more durable, low shine, polyethylene monofilament yarns over the past 10 years has made the use of artificial grass a real alternative to real grass on lawns and high wear areas such as tees, putting greens and walkways.

The development of rubber filled artificial turf in particular; has solved many of the problems of wet tees for both greenkeeper and golfer alike.

A fully synthetic golf course is now a real practical possibility, although the demand and need for such a facility in the UK is questionable. Due to cost, this still remains an unlikely event; but without question courses and clubs up and down the country could benefit from some sort of artificial influence – whether it be used for tees during the wetter months or all – year – round, putting greens, walk ways or to enhance the appearance of the landscape.

Chris Pickles, of Play-Rite, is another to feel that golf has been slow to pick up on artificial turf but is aware of the reasons.

"The high costs involved are an obvious reason and no perfect replacement for natural grass greens has been found so it is difficult to switch," explained Chris, addinh that an old fashioned thought process has also prevented artificial turf from making inroads in other than general pathways and routine high maintenance areas.

The chicken and egg concept also appears to prevent much major development in the golf industry as Chris concedes that the game isn't at the front of their minds.

"There is very little development going on in the golf side as it is a very small market and the only work has really been on winter tees and practice/teaching mats."

So it would appear that for the time being at least artificial turf has obvious benefits to golf in a limited area but any thought of wall to wall artificial is a long long way off.

Websites of interest:

- www.activeleisurecontracts.co.uk
- www.technicalsurfaces.co.uk
- www.tigerturf.co.uk
- www.huxleygolf.com
- www.thegreenapproach.com
- www.verdesports.com
- www.play-rite.co.uk

Andrew Baylis is MD of Kent based contractors Active Leisure Contracts who are exclusive UK distributors of "Tee Turf".

ALC have installed artificial solutions at various golf clubs, football, rugby and hockey clubs as well as Local Authorities.

ALC are also UK distributors for Poligras which will be used at all hockey pitches at the 2007 Olympics in Beijing.

Issued on behalf of Active Leisure Contracts by Fusion Media (Europe) Limited

Telephone: +44 (0) 1322 424 499

Facsimile: +44 (0) 1322 424 515

Email: info@fusionmediaeurope.com

www.fusionmediaeurope.com

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