

NATURAL GRASS WILL BE A PERMANENT FEATURE IN TORONTO'S BMO FIELD



Latest News. The proposal to replace BMO Field's artificial turf with natural grass received overwhelming support and approval from the Board of Governors of Exhibition Place on September 11 and again by Toronto City Council on September 30. Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment will shoulder the \$5.5 million dollar price tag which includes \$3.5 million for the natural grass conversion at BMO Field, 1.2 million for the relocation of its bubble to Lamport Stadium and \$800,000 for a new artificial field in the community. STA Member Claus Zander of Zander Sod Co. Limited will be speaking at the 2010 Ontario Turfgrass Symposium about the project's sod production and specifications, and the challenges of installation and removal. The following article from thestar.com provides an interesting overview of the situation.

Real Madrid gets the grass that Toronto FC can only hope for... August 6, Daniel Girard, Sports Reporter

It's the field of TFC's dreams. The much-maligned artificial turf of BMO Field gave way to the real thing yesterday as a crew of 18 finished laying the grass ahead of the arrival of European soccer giant Real Madrid for an international friendly against Toronto FC.

"This is a 10-day solution," Bob Hunter, executive vice-president of Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, said of the lifespan of the four-inch thick sod being put down.

"It's a temporary solution to reflect the quality of the team that we're playing Friday night," he said.

Trucked in from Alliston by NGF Golf of Campbellville, which spends most of its time laying fairways not soccer fields, the 24-hour installation was completed last night in time for Real Madrid's practice before thousands tonight.

The company consulted with crews in the New Jersey Meadowlands who laid turf down for US national team games.



COURTESY OF CLAUS ZANDER

For purists of the beautiful game, the sight of the sun glistening off the sprinkler-soaked grass on a spectacular summer day was no doubt a treat. It will be fleeting, however, as the sod – double the thick-

ness of what typically gets put down as a lawn – is to be torn up Sunday and thrown away.

But more than just a move to make the visitors feel welcome, Hunter said the \$250,000 outlay for temporary grass was “a key condition” to getting the winners of a record 31 Spanish titles and nine European Cups to bring their high-priced lineup to Toronto as part of a two-game tour of North America.

“They have obviously two or three of the world’s best players on their squad,” he said of newly acquired talent headlined by Cristiano Ronaldo, Kaka and Karim Benzema, who are part of about \$385 million in off-season signings by the club.

“They only play on grass.” Real Madrid has two or three of the world’s best players on their squad. They, as well as everyone involved with Toronto FC from club management to star Dwayne DeRosario to those going through the turnstiles, have called for permanent grass.

“They only play on grass.”

Real Madrid plays again Sunday, facing D.C. United on the grass of FedEx Field in Landover, Md.

Since even before TFC played its first home game at BMO Field in April 2007, the FieldTurf has been a source of controversy for players and fans alike. But the issue has boiled over this season in part because everyone, from club management to star Dwayne De Rosario to those going through the turnstiles, have called for permanent grass.

Hunter, who put the price tag at about \$3.5 million, including a heating system for spring and fall as well as drainage and aeration, said MLSE, which owns TFC, agrees and is ready to pay the cost.

“To make the game as authentic as it’s supposed to be, natural grass is your long-term solution,” he said.

But it’s not that simple.

A key part of the deal to secure government funding for the \$63 million stadium was providing year-round access to the playing field. That resulted in turf and installation of a bubble each winter.

Last year, community use accounted for about 1,500 hours at BMO Field for everything from exercise classes to youth soccer.

Until MLSE comes up with a plan to accommodate that public use elsewhere, it will be difficult to get political approval to convert the stadium playing surface to grass.

“It’s very popular with the community and it’s the only real bubble in the downtown core,” said Dianne Young, chief executive officer at Exhibition Place, which manages the site, including BMO Field.

Noting the whole purpose of the funding arrangement was to “promote local sports,” Young said there have been talks with MLSE but no formal proposal has come forward to make the conversion to grass.

Once the pitch comes forward, it could take a couple of months to get it before city council, she said.

Hunter, who insisted the stadium’s community use provision is “absolutely the right thing to do with public money,” said MLSE still hopes to get approval for a conversion early this fall so it could be done in time for next season but added it’s more likely to be for 2011.

Meanwhile, Hunter is sure the temporary field will pass the test of the club that FIFA, the sport’s governing body, voted the most successful of the 20th century.

“We’re confident they’ll find this very suitable to play on,” he said. ♦

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Numbers Game

\$250,000 Cost to install real grass at BMO Field

10 Days the grass will last

24 Hours to install the field

18 People to put in the field

10 Tractor-trailer loads of sod

3x100 Feet, size of the sod rolls
4 Thickness of sod in inches

24 Hours to take the field out when it’s all over

The Real Deal

Here’s a list of significant team moments unrelated to its numerous championship titles that made the Real Madrid one of the most famous teams in the world:

1902

Madrid Club de Fútbol founded.

1920

Real, meaning royal, added to team name after endorsement by Spain’s King Alfonso XIII.

1931

Real title dropped and crown removed from team crest after downfall of the monarchy.

1941

Real name and crown restored two years after the end of the Spanish Civil War.

1947

First Spanish team to add numbers to its jerseys.

2001

Team crest updated by changing traditionally coloured mulberry stripe to blue.

2006

Record home game attendance set at 83,329. Official stadium capacity: 80,354.