

Tried and tested – unique turf for the Titans' field of dreams

Skilled Park stadium, Gold Coast QLD

The new NRL team, Gold Coast Titans, is playing in a new stadium where the real crowd pleaser is under the posts – a grass that took two years of testing and trials to be deemed the best turf for the job.

Home to the new NRL team the Gold Coast Titans, the new 27,000 seat Skilled Park stadium features innovative landscape and environmental design, thanks in part to the persistence and vision of Peter Cronin, the Ground Supervising Manager, who has been with the project from day one.

"We had 1.1 hectares of turf area to be covered that had to withstand a number of sports and other events," explains Peter. "We started with 22 grasses and tested and trailed and got it down to a final eight."

The turf trials were conducted by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries Turf Research Centre and overseen by the New Zealand Sports Turf Institute. For good measure, the University of NSW did some contributing research.

When the going gets rough, the grass gets tough

After intensive wear trials, fertiliser and strength trials, a blend called Grand Prix was the turf of choice, a bred grass combination of C4 and wintergreen couch, with the benefit of strong rhizomes.

"We laid 11,500 square metres of washed turf," explains Peter. "Washed turf establishes roots immediately after installation as the roots penetrate quickly and deeply into the soil profile. You get a healthier and more wear-tolerant turf."

The stadium is one of a number of stadia run by the Major Sports Facilities Authority of Queensland.

A fast playing surface needs GT stripes

The playing field features river sand with sub drainage and a complex series of 54 pop up sprinklers organised by standalone computerised control. Filters in the main drain around the field take out phosphates, nitrates, organophosphates and other contaminants and the result is almost drinking water at the other end.

This filtration is vital as the field uses recycled water and rainwater for irrigation.

Adhering to Peter's environmental requirements was the necessity to avoid leaching of fertiliser nutrients into the nearby creek. "We did fertiliser tests on the field soil. We are using Scotts Sierraform GT for its slow release N+K qualities. Also because of the silicate in it and that it doesn't leach potassium into the creek.

"I've used Scotts before and got very good results. We'll see how this GT goes.



"Our landscaping on the stadium perimeter groups together plants that coexist with the same fertiliser and water needs. We run fertiliser and wetting agents through the fertigation system for both inside and outside the field. All self contained."

Peter kicked 14 goals

In the initial design of the new stadium, Peter insisted on 15 important requirements. He achieved 14 of them. "A good return, I reckon."

Along with the environmental and recycled water initiatives, these requirements included wider pitch entries for increased air movement plus access for trucks (though they can't enter the playing surface), exhaust fans in the workshop to remove fertiliser dust in the air and artificial turf on the western side of the ground to assist with wear and shade issues.

The stadium is designed for multi-purpose use. In music concerts, people in their thousands will swarm over the pitch. The turf has to be protected so Peter uses a UK product called Terraflor, a moveable polyurethane flooring tile that accommodates heavy pedestrian traffic but lets light and water through to the turf.

"We've used Terraflor for U2 and Robbie Williams concerts at other venues," says Peter. "It takes 16 men 8 hours to lay the field. We fertilise before the event and at the end the turf is looking better than ever."

From removable goal posts without the use of a crane to 80% of crowds being shielded from the rain without a retractable roof, Skilled Park may well be the pioneer of stadia for the future, in part through one man's dogged persistence. "There are some very good people involved in this project," says Peter. "I think the fans will be pleased."