

IN A LEAGUE

Powerleague Fives' latest and most high profile Wembley City football centre — located adjacent to the hallowed turf at Wembley Stadium — boasts 3G rubber crumb pitch technology.



Support in Sport (SIS) recently completed the 45th football centre for Powerleague Fives Ltd — leader in 5 — and 7-a-side football — with leading edge artificial turf, in the shadows of Wembley Stadium.



OF ITS OWN

Rising in the shadows of England's spiritual home of football — Wembley Stadium — is a similarly impressive new grassroots development, which will allow amateurs and professionals, young or old, from all walks of life to perform against the backdrop of one of the world's greatest football arenas. The Wembley City project, officially unveiled in mid-April 2011, is Powerleague Fives' fourth site in the capital and offers both 5 — and 7-a-side football on leading edge artificial turf. This latest and most high profile of the company's football centres, boasts 3G rubber crumb pitch technology, as well as an attractive bar/lounge area, changing rooms, and a patio laid with sand-filled artificial grass.

Established originally as 'Pitz' in 1988 in Paisley, seven miles east of Glasgow, Powerleague has become the largest operator of small-sided pitches in the world, and are the self-confessed 'Champions of 5-a-side'.

A world away from the pilot, first-generation, small-sided artificial pitch of the late 1980s — the first of its kind in the UK — Powerleague has burgeoned to a bustling national network. Its portfolio now numbers 45 state-of-the-art football centres across the UK, including the biggest of its kind in Europe; Powerleague Trafford, with its twenty-three pitches. However, it is Powerleague Wembley that is the feather in their cap, in a sport which has now overtaken 11-a-side football in the UK in terms of player numbers.

Strong partnerships have played a pivotal role in Powerleague's success — no better exemplified than in its nine-year relationship with Support in Sport (SIS); the manufacturer, supplier, and installer of every one of its football centre developments over that time.

Extended Service Involvement

SIS extended their service involvement still further with the Wembley City project, as the remit for the build was to make this one was 'a little bit special', with vibrant colours and key sponsors, ensuring that each of the seven pitches (six 5-a-side and one 7-a-side) carried its own unique identity and character.

"Given the profile of the site and the fact that players were competing in the shadow of Wembley Stadium, meant that we felt it important to create a unique experience," explained Tony Scott, Powerleague's Development Manager.

Scott continued: "Part of this experience was set around our key sponsor partners, headline sponsor Lucozade, Nike, Nivea for men, Carlsberg, and SIS, who each had their own pitch with their own designs.

"We liked the idea that visitors could play on the Nike pitch, or the Lucozade pitch, with on-pitch sponsorship adding to the atmosphere and excitement and sense of occasion. It's about creating a strong brand that would do justice to such a fantastic location." Each of the sponsors has a bespoke designed surface with logos and colour schemes of their choice.

Powerleague's confidence in SIS's design and installation know-how proved longstanding, as SIS's Chief Executive Officer George Mullan advised: "We have installed or renovated every one of its sites, and we enjoy an excellent working relationship with the company, one founded on the depth of knowledge and quality of build that we can deliver as part of our one-stop-shop service."

Mullan added: "Everything is UK manufactured, including the bespoke surface that is designed to stand up to intensive use, and our fencing system, robust enough to soak up heavy usage."

Rising to the Challenge

Location is everything, as they say, and Tony Scott is expecting the new site to be hugely popular, not least because of its Wembley Stadium backdrop. However, as Wembley Stadium will attest to, if the pitch is not right, all the good work off the pitch can be compromised.

This latest venture challenged the expertise of longstanding partner SIS, whose credentials would be put to the test with the desire from Powerleague to have not only the latest 3G rubber crumb pitches, but also an imposing sponsor focus. SIS rose to the challenge with the construction of a two-tiered pitch layout, which



Each of the Wembley City Powerleague sponsors has a bespoke designed surface with logos and colour schemes of their choice — pictured Nike and SIS pitches.



also saw the installation of a UK-first in the form of a demountable fencing system, which has been specifically designed for the site, utilising removable modules to provide a more open plan profile to pitches during events.

SIS Group has a proven track record in producing world-class natural and artificial sports surfaces throughout the world, including for the African Nations Cup 2010, FIFA World Cup 2006, five UEFA Champions League final venues, and for such illustrious clubs as Real Madrid, FC Porto, and Sporting Lisbon.

The highlight of Powerleague's relationship with SIS to date has to be the Wembley City development, as Scott highlighted: "We can't stress enough how important it's been for us to have a company in partnership who can offer the full turnkey service.

"From the manufacturer stage through to installation and aftercare maintenance, having the product delivered on time and on budget has meant all developments have been overwhelming successes, and we expect Wembley City to enjoy similar if not even greater popularity [to the other Powerleague football centres]."

Going Back to the Start

Planning permission for the Wembley City Powerleague football centre's site work to proceed happened at the end of 2010.



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The site had previously been a storage ground for Wembley Stadium, as SIS's Contracts Manager, Simon Mroczek explained: "The levels were all over the place when we started, so the first job in hand was to bring them up to a standard and establish the two tiers, with four lower pitches and three upper.

"There needed to be as little excavation work as possible as we didn't want to dig up too much of the existing concrete. Instead, we imported 3,000 tonnes of recycled infill to prepare the levels for laying drainage at 10m centres."

Designed and manufactured in SIS's UK factory in Maryport, Cumbria, the Superior 50, long-pile fibrillated carpet is claimed to be the most technologically-advanced available. Its sand and rubber filled surface is designed to be skin-friendly, allowing for the best footballing experience without many of the painful pitfalls of earlier synthetic designs.

Replicating Natural Turf

"Older models were often extremely hard on the knees and could be detrimental to players in tackles and when the skin met the carpet," said Mroczek. "The 3G pitch negates against these issues and replicates the natural turf experience far more effectively."

The design stages, on this occasion, also drew in a third party to accommodate the extensive logoing that adorns each carpet. A Dutch company was tasked with the job of weaving the logos and signage into the synthetic turf. Once the carpets were manufactured, they were shipped to Holland with each of the sponsor's designs, then returned to the UK for final installation by SIS.

The Wembley City project marks a first for SIS in sponsoring one of its own Powerleague pitches to this scale. Mroczek commented: "The Old Street London project saw us installing sponsored pitches for the first time, but only on a small scale. The grandeur and profile of the Wembley project was such that we wanted to do something special with our pitch, so we went for a vibrant purple carpet with our logo woven large and central in the pitch."

As with other Powerleague projects, the relationship with SIS will continue long after the work is complete, with the installer providing continuing maintenance, allowing the footballing experience to remain as impressive in time as it is now. In tandem with this, a regular maintenance regime will be conducted by Powerleague's own in-house team, following care guidance, based on regular brushing, as set out by SIS.

Working side by side with Mroczek on this project was Marie Cooksey, Contracts and Marketing Manager for SIS.

"The Wembley [City] project was the first occasion that I'd moved out from the purely construction side to the design team," said Cooksey. "Simon and I were given the responsibility for generating ideas for the SIS pitch design. The creative problem-solving task was a great challenge for me, being involved in arguably Powerleague's most high profile site."

Marking a First for SIS

Cooksey led the way on branding the SIS pitch, which marked a first for the company in terms of sponsoring one of its own pitches. As probably the UK's first and only female pitch constructor, Marie was keen to take the chance to work with the finished product and be involved at the business end of the relationship with Powerleague, as she explained: "I've spent all my career building pitches, so it has been a valuable experience for me to see how the branding elements work, and how I've acquired a real taste for it, I hope to fulfil this role in future projects."

The final word went to Sean Tracey, CEO for Powerleague Fives Ltd: "SIS really understand synthetic turf and respond at short notice with a professional approach. They are clearly experts, offering a full design and build package. SIS's small-sided football systems have, over time, demonstrated durability, functionality and ease of maintenance."

With its portfolio of work not just for Powerleague Fives, but also for sporting greats including the likes of Real Madrid, FC Porto, Sporting Lisbon and Saracens, SIS truly seems to be in a league of its own! ✨

For further information, please visit:
www.powerleague.co.uk
www.supportinsport.com



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