

Pelé backs artificial turf for 2010 World Cup

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Most soccer players aren't crazy about playing on artificial turf, but Pelé – the game's greatest player ever – would like to see games at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa played on artificial-turf fields.

Speaking to delegates at the 2004 Sports Turf Summit in Germany, the Brazilian soccer maestro said he recently played on artificial-turf at the training facilities of his former club Santos and that he was impressed by the new generation of synthetic surfaces.

He also encouraged FIFA, the sport's world governing body, to ensure that some games at the 2010 World Cup be played on artificial turf.



Soccer legend Pelé wants the 2010 World Cup to be played on artificial turf. (CP Photo)

"Everything's possible today. If the artificial grass is good the players will like it – they want to play on good fields," said Pelé, who led Brazil to World Cup victories in 1958, 1962 and 1970.

"I trained on these artificial-turf pitches at Santos and they are perfect. Bad players used to give the excuse that the field was not good. But now they cannot do this. If they don't have good control it's their fault."

No World Cup match has ever been played on a synthetic surface. However, earlier this year FIFA revised its regulations to allow qualifying matches for all its competitions to be played on artificial turf.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter has previously said that matches at the 2010 World Cup could be played on artificial turf due to climatic problems in producing quality natural-grass pitches in South Africa.

Pelé played for the New York Cosmos of the old North American Soccer League during the 1970s and has first-hand experience of playing on old artificial turf. The soccer legend said the quality of today's artificial-turf fields represents a massive improvement from the ones he played on.

"We had problems with the ball rolling too much and bouncing too high. And when you used to slide, you burnt yourself. But this new technology is like good natural turf."

Traditionally, soccer players have voiced concerns over playing on artificial turf because they feel the risk of injury is greater, but according to Pelé, "players don't get hurt as much as on natural grass. This is one of the great advantages."