

September 2, 2014

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Dear Confederation Presidents:

As you know, leading female and male athletes are standing together and opposing the Canadian Soccer Association's and FIFA's discriminatory decision to host the 2015 women's World Cup on artificial turf fields -- a surface recognized as inferior for international soccer -- rather than the grass pitches slated for men at least through the 2022 tournament. I write to update you on the effort to ensure that CSA and FIFA stop mistreating elite female athletes and start obeying the law. I also seek your assistance in ensuring that your respective national federations do not engage in improper and possibly illegal intimidation of players who support or join our effort.

At present, neither CSA nor FIFA has responded to the letter sent to them a month ago on behalf of the world's leading players. Instead, lacking a credible justification for treating women's World Cup participants unfairly, each has tried to assign responsibility to the other. Moreover, in recent days, we have obtained what can fairly be characterized as "smoking gun" evidence that, throughout last year, FIFA misled players into believing that World Cup 2015 organizers would provide natural grass fields if there was opposition to artificial turf. Specifically, at the 2013 Algarve Cup, 190 players representing a dozen leading national teams completed a questionnaire at FIFA's request. FIFA led the players to believe that the survey was being conducted so that their opinions on preferred playing surfaces for major tournaments, including the 2015 World Cup, would be analyzed and acted upon. According to the survey's findings (excerpts attached and highlighted): "**[t]he majority of players were in agreement that all top level professional matches should be played on natural turf [grass]**" and "**there was strong agreement that all matches at a major tournament should be played on natural turf [grass].**" But instead of following the players' obvious sentiments (as well as anti-discrimination laws), World Cup 2015 organizers simply ignored the very opinions they solicited.

As for the reports of possible intimidation and reprisal, we are gravely concerned that certain national federations appear to be pressuring players to refrain from publicly criticizing World Cup organizers and to abstain from joining the coalition prepared to institute legal action

to secure safe, lawful and equal playing fields at the tournament. Such intimidation may run afoul of anti-retaliation laws which mandate that victims of gender discrimination have the right to institute or participate in legal proceedings without threat of reprisal. This right is something the attorneys representing the players take very seriously. I urge you to take every necessary step to ensure that your national federations are not violating the players' rights. Players must feel free to criticize the gender discrimination proposed for the most important event in their sport and join any legal proceedings necessary to vindicate their human rights under applicable law.

Indeed, national federations should be joining the call to fix CSA's and FIFA's mistake, not trying to silence their athletes. CSA and FIFA are male-dominated organizations with past episodes of apparent discriminatory or demeaning treatment towards women according to published reports. Perhaps not surprisingly, CSA and FIFA have failed in their duty to plan a World Cup worthy of the female players and consistent with playing conditions provided to male players.

The installation of natural grass surfaces for the women's World Cup would cost just a small fraction of CSA's and FIFA's annual budgets. National federations could also afford the modest financial cost a fix would involve, as could your continental confederations. In fact, according to recent reports, UEFA's own 2013 European Women's Championship provides a model for ensuring a first-class grass surface even in a stadium with a pre-existing plastic pitch.

Please let me know if your organizations will play a leadership role in convincing the Canadian Soccer Association and FIFA to reverse their indefensible course and immediately begin preparations for a world class tournament on superior grass surfaces.

Sincerely,



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cc:

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Joseph S. Blatter, FIFA

# FIFA Questionnaire Results

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## ELITE FEMALE PLAYERS' PERCEPTIONS OF FOOTBALL PLAYING SURFACES

Dr. J. Roberts, Dr. A. Harland and A. Smith

28/11/2013

## Foreword

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All of the plots and comments presented in this report are observations made on the sample only. Statistical significance tests have not been conducted to establish whether any of the differences and/or trends suggested by the sample data are statistically significant (i.e. whether these reflect definitive differences/trends that truly exist amongst the population of elite female players or have simply been observed in the sample simply by chance).

## Background

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In 2012, FIFA commissioned the Sports Technology Institute of Loughborough University to conduct a study to determine players' perceptions of playing surfaces and their influence on the game of football. Stage one of the study utilised interviews and focus groups to identify the major themes that elite players perceived were important when discussing playing surfaces<sup>1</sup>. Subsequently, a questionnaire was developed to capture elite player's perceptions of these major themes, which included perceptions of injury, style of play, surface conditions, footwear and ball behaviour on different playing surfaces<sup>2</sup>. From the initial questionnaire, over 1000 players from across the globe, both male and female completed the questionnaire<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, further information was required of elite female players' perceptions of playing surfaces in particular with regard to their opinion of major tournaments which is included in this report. Therefore, the original questionnaire was modified to include an additional section incorporating questions regarding elite female players' opinions on preferred playing surfaces for major tournaments. The revised questionnaire is included in the Appendix of this report.

In total, 190 elite female players (height, mean 169.5 cm, range 156.0 cm – 187.0 cm; weight, mean 62.4 kg, range 43.0 kg – 81.0 kg; age, mean 24 years, range 15 – 37 years) completed the questionnaire during an international tournament. Therefore the results are representative of the sample from three confederations; AFC, CONCACAF and UEFA.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronkainen, J., Osei-Owusu, P., Webster, J., Harland, A. and Roberts, J. Elite player assessment of playing surfaces for football. *Procedia Engineering*; 2011; 837-842

<sup>2</sup> Elite Football Player's Perceptions of Playing Surfaces – Questionnaire Methodology

<sup>3</sup> Owen A, Roberts J, Harland A, Osei-Owusu P and Smith A. The application of statistical modelling to elite players' perceptions of football playing surfaces. Conference proceedings: 4th International Conference on Mathematics in Sport; 2013.

## Summary

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### Surface Experience

- The majority of the elite female players predominantly played and trained on natural turf pitches as juniors and seniors, although a notable percentage have used artificial turf regularly during their senior careers.
- Natural and artificial turf pitches were often viewed as adequate across junior and senior level football.

### Injury

- Although the majority of players believed the type of surface could contribute to injuries, only half of those had experienced an injury themselves.
- Of those players who had experienced an injury many had been using artificial turf at the time.

### Ball Interaction/Style of Play

- There was a slight indication that players would change their style of play either as an individual or through coach instruction due to the playing surface. When directly comparing artificial and natural pitches, those players who did change their style of play indicated they would make more challenges in particular, sliding tackles on natural turf.

### Footwear

- Two thirds of the players stated they would choose their footwear based on the type of surface; however there was no clear footwear choice on good quality, hard natural turf or artificial turf.

### Pitch Comparisons

- The majority of players were in agreement that all top level professional matches should be played on natural turf. With regard to whether players prefer to play on a modern artificial turf pitch than a poor quality natural turf pitch, differences were observed.

### Major Tournaments

- Once more there was strong agreement that all matches at a major tournament should be played on natural turf. The players seemed unsure as to whether more time would be needed between games if matches were played on artificial turf.
- If artificial turf pitches were to be used in a major tournament, there was a clear divide in opinion regarding whether all matches should be played on artificial turf during that tournament or only the occasional game if absolutely necessary.

## 7.0 Major Tournaments

The use of artificial pitches in major tournaments has caused much debate.

Please complete the following questions so that your views can be taken into account when planning future tournaments.

7.1 "All matches at a major international tournament should be played on natural turf"

Strongly disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

## Section 7 – Major Tournament Opinions

All matches at a major tournament should be played on natural turf

Strongly Disagree/Disagree    Neutral    Strongly Agree/Agree

