

# Grass at Vancouver's BC Place gets thumbs up from World Cup stars

Some of the globe's top soccer players have given the stadium turf a stamp of approval

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The natural grass pitch installed at Vancouver's BC Place stadium for the World Cup has passed its first test, with some of the globe's top soccer players giving it a stamp of approval.

Australia defeated Turkey 2-0 Saturday in a surprise win in the first-ever men's World Cup game played in Vancouver. BC Place, which is hosting seven matches, is one of eight stadiums that had to convert its artificial turf pitch to natural grass to meet FIFA's requirements.

Australian midfielder Aiden O'Neill, who played on the stadium's usual pitch against the Vancouver Whitecaps with his New York City FC back in April, called the temporary World Cup playing surface "unbelievable."

"I think they've done such a good job to have it in the condition that it's in, and I think it will stay like that for the rest of the time," he told reporters after Saturday's game. "The ball moved well. It wasn't too hard. It wasn't too soft. I think they've got it perfect, to be honest."



Australia's Connor Metcalfe, right, celebrates scoring his team's second goal during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Group D match against Turkey, at BC Place in Vancouver on Saturday. DEAN MOUHTAROPOULOS/GETTY IMAGES

This year's is the most geographically dispersed World Cup to date, with 16 host cities spread across Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. The complex logistics posed challenges in ensuring that each pitch met FIFA's strict pitch performance requirements – including for ball bounce and shock absorption – and that they behaved similarly despite being spread

across three climatic zones and different elevations.

To do this, FIFA enlisted turfgrass scientists from the University of Tennessee and Michigan State University who spent US\$5-million and five years researching and developing this year's pitches.

A blend of Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass, known

for its tolerance of temperate climates, was chosen for BC Place. A sod farm in Abbotsford, B.C., grew the grass for a full year, ensuring maturity and consistency, and it was harvested and installed in May.

The sod is rooted into 340 millimetres of sand and peat, which sits atop a foundation of polymer geocells, a waterproof liner and a

network of sensors connected to irrigation and vacuum ventilation systems. Grow lights help the grass recover between matches, while industrial fans prevent root rot and fungal growth.

Some skeptical soccer fans criticized the North American pitches before the tournament even began, convinced the thin rolls of sod and quick turnaround time after installation would make for terrible – and even dangerous – playing surfaces.

Australian goalkeeper Patrick Beach said his team inspected the field the day prior, with everyone giving positive reviews, and that it performed well on match day.

"The pitch was great quality tonight, especially when it's nice and wet. The ball moves really well," he said. "I think it was great for both teams."

Turkey captain Hakan Calhanoglu similarly complimented BC Place, which drew a full house of 52,497 spectators on Saturday.

"The quality of the stadium was very nice," he said. "The pitch was very good, in the perfect condition. It was nice to play on."

BC Place will next host Canada and Qatar on Thursday. Canada is still looking for its first win at the tournament after Friday's 1-1 draw with Bosnia-Herzegovina, which secured the Canadian men's national team its first-ever World Cup point.

## How peregrine falcon chicks nesting in the rafters at BMO Field complicated World Cup preparations

OM SHANBHAG

Less than three weeks before the first World Cup game at Toronto's BMO Field, four peregrine falcon chicks were getting ready to leave their nest in the rafters high above the soccer pitch.

The chicks, which will grow into some of the fastest animals in the world, were about to learn to fly and their highly protective parents posed a safety risk for workers setting up lights and speakers, and hanging up signs near the top of the stadium.

Stadium officials contacted Dan Frankian.

Mr. Frankian, a professional wildlife falconer, founded Hawkeye, a bird and animal control business, in 1989 and has been called upon as a problem-solver hundreds of times.

"They said, 'Dan, can you handle this kind of thing?' and I said, 'We already have a standing permit for this kind of thing.'"

Removing the nest was not Mr. Frankian's preference.

"Why do we bother doing all the nest removal, moving all this, moving all that, and then having to find a different spot?" he said, referring to the idea of relocating the falcon nest.

Instead, his solution was a series of nets and protective equipment aimed at keeping the birds separated from the workers because Mr. Frankian knew the birds would learn to take flight before the first game.

Mr. Frankian said his job was to adjust his methods based on his observations of the birds' behaviour.

Peregrine falcons are notoriously defensive around their nests, even after their young have left, said David Bird, an emeritus professor of wildlife biology at McGill University. The young chicks still rely on the parents for food as they learn to fly and hunt, perching nearby to be fed.

Dr. Bird said anyone who went near the young during this phase would hear the falcons making a lot of noise and may even have the adult falcons dive at them.

Every peregrine falcon is different, just like people, said Dr. Bird. Some are defensive while others might just fly away.

Dr. Bird wasn't surprised the peregrine falcons had chosen the rafters above the stadium as a nesting site. The species is flexible when it comes to nesting locations, though the birds particularly like to nest on cliffs at the edge of a body of water.

To a peregrine, a lakeside city is an oasis of steel and glass cliffs, with abundant nesting sites and lots of seabirds and pigeons for food. To top it off, the activity of a city



A spokesperson says the City of Toronto monitors peregrine falcon activity at BMO Field every year and it has been involved in ensuring appropriate safety measures were taken for the falcons and workers this year. ALEJANDRO GOMEZ GARCIA/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

keeps away predators of peregrine falcon eggs like the great horned owl.

Civic conservation authorities are also motivated to protect the birds. Starting in the mid-1900s, the insecticide DDT was heavily used in North America to control malaria-bearing insects and pests.

The peregrine falcon population across Canada began to disappear. Biologists started finding peregrines laying eggs with shells that were too thin and broke when adult falcons sat on the eggs to incubate them.

Since the falcons are at the top of their food chain, the insecticide accumulated in the birds through their prey. By 1990, the use of DDT had been completely phased out in North America, owing to the environmental damage it caused.

"Peregrine falcons are what I call canaries in the coal mine," said Dr. Bird, pointing to more recent research that has shown DDT is carcinogenic.

The populations of peregrine falcons have been brought back through extensive conservation efforts.

Sally Williams, a volunteer with Friends of Canadian Peregrine Foundation, gives peregrine falcon chicks a second try at flight, picking up stunned fledglings that have just had their first awkward effort at leaving the nest.

"The first flight is a very clumsy, slow flap, flap, flap, and then they come to the ground. We put them back up high," said Ms. Williams. When they land on the ground, the young are vulnerable and freeze up in response to the unfamiliar en-

vironment and hazards of a city.

Ms. Williams and other volunteers monitor seven nesting sites for peregrine falcons across the Greater Toronto Area, since the birds often nest in the same locations every year. The Friends of Canadian Peregrine Foundation also bands the falcon chicks, to identify and keep track of them.

Imane Boussaid, a spokesperson for the City of Toronto, said in an e-mailed statement the city monitors peregrine falcon activity at BMO Field every year and it has been involved in ensuring appropriate safety measures were taken for the falcons and workers this year.

In an e-mailed statement, Mike Fenn, a spokesperson for Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources, confirmed that the department was made aware of the peregrine falcon nest at the stadium and that it is monitoring the situation.

BMO Field did not respond to a request for comment.

FIFA spokesperson Adam Steiss said the organization has a wildlife and stray animal policy, which was followed. But he did not comment on further details.

The peregrine falcon chicks have now successfully left the nest and will be swooping around the city, learning to hunt. Mr. Frankian said he was proud of his work.

"Nobody got hurt," he said. "When people ask me, 'Why do you spend so much time caring for birds of prey?' it's two reasons. A: I love birds of prey just for the pure love of birds of prey. But second, and this is somewhat very important: Anything they die of, we die of."

## GHANA TO PLAN LEGAL ACTION OVER PARTEY VISA DENIAL

Ghana's government said Saturday it plans legal action over Canada's "high-handed and extremely unfair" decision to deny midfielder Thomas Partey a visa for the country's World Cup opener while he awaits a rape trial in London.

Mr. Partey returned to the Ghana men's national team base camp in Smithfield, R.I., after being refused entry to Canada for Wednesday's match against Panama in Toronto.

The 32-year-old has pleaded not guilty to multiple allegations from several women dating to his time at English club Arsenal between 2020 and 2025. He is scheduled to stand trial in November or later.

Ghana's government said it "reaffirms the fundamental legal principle of the presumption of innocence," a point also cited by coach Carlos Queiroz when selecting Mr. Partey for the World Cup squad.

"While respecting Canada's sovereign right to enforce its immigration laws, Ghana considers that reliance on unproven charges in the absence of a judicial determination raises fundamental questions of fairness and proportionality," the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

"Accordingly, Ghana is pursuing active diplomatic engagements with the relevant Canadian authorities on this matter."

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada said Friday it makes its decisions on a case-by-case basis and that hosting major events does not change its laws.

"Canada is proud to be a host country for the 2026 FIFA World Cup and is working to facilitate a successful event while maintaining the safety and security of Canadians," the statement read. "Canada has been consistent that hosting major events does not change Canada's immigration laws. Every person seeking to come to Canada is assessed individually, based on the facts available and the law that applies." THE CANADIAN PRESS WITH REPORTS FROM THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## SOMALI REFEREE DENIED U.S. ENTRY FOR WORLD CUP TO RECEIVE FULL TOURNAMENT PAY

The Somali referee who was denied entry to the United States for the World Cup will still be paid his full tournament fee.

A person with knowledge of the situation told the Associated Press that Omar Artan will still be entitled to payment despite not officiating any games at the near six-week long event. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because they were

not authorized to speak publicly.

They said the fee would be determined after the tournament concludes next month.

Mr. Artan is one of soccer's top officials and was named Africa's best male referee in 2025. But the Somali national was denied entry after arriving at Miami International Airport from Istanbul last week.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection said Mr. Artan was "inadmissible due to vetting concerns."

He had originally been issued a visa to travel to the U.S., according to the Somalia Embassy in Kenya, which processed it, and was due to meet up with other World Cup referees at their training base in Miami. FIFA said it was not involved in

the immigration processes and that the host government ultimately determines who is granted entry. As a result it said Mr. Artan would not be able to train and officiate at the World Cup.

The 34-year-old Mr. Artan was given a hero's welcome when he returned to Somalia earlier this week and vowed to attend the next edition of the World Cup – mainly staged in Morocco, Por-

tugal and Spain – in 2030. He was also appointed to officiate one of European soccer's show-case games, the UEFA Super Cup in August.

"Football is made to connect people and UEFA wants to show its respect to Omar and his outstanding officiating skills," UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin said in a statement. ASSOCIATED PRESS