

Brigid's reap pitch benefits



THUMBS UP: "It's marvellous to be able to train and play matches on a surface like this all-year round" says Kevin Kilmurray of the new all-weather surface at St. Brigid's.

All-weather surface gets a thumbs up from players

KEVIN Kilmurray drove through the gates of Russell Park. It's a terrain he knows well. But on this occasion he arrived to make a pitch ... about a pitch.

And what a pitch. The St. Brigid's all-weather surface is the stage for all-seasons. It's the talk of the town.

Everybody that seen it, or sampled its turf, has been impressed.

And in the busy run-up to Christmas, it hosted a harvest of critical matches.

Kilmurray is the supremo of the company that installed the Sprinturf sod.

He's delighted with its success and the response it has got. He, too, has known the muddy days as a player and a manager.

He chuckles at the memory of the famous incident at the Baseball Ground in Derby many years ago when the groundsman had to come on with a bucket of white-wash to re-paint the penalty spot before Gerry Daly could take a penalty kick.

The Baseball Ground was the worst in England. The Elanchardestown ground is the best of its kind.

"Let's face it, the mud and dirt of the winter days and having to play on terrible pitches are slowing fading away," declares Kevin.

"I'm not saying that we are going to eliminate the grass pitch. But isn't it marvellous to be able to train and play matches on a surface like this all-year round."



FEELS GOOD: Shane Kelly of St. Mary's and Mick Curran of Thomas Davis give the new pitch at Russell Park, with the St. Brigid's club's crest, a good testing.

With the St. Brigid's crest in its middle, the pitch indeed is a wonderful sight.

And once you enter the arena, it's like walking on a newly laid carpet in your sitting room.

"This pitch took years of planning, and it involved some very good people from the club here all sitting down and polling their ideas.

"This pitch is the only one of its kind in Europe. It's a number one seller in America.

"It's an American company and they concentrated on the American market. But now they have come into Europe."

It's been a big success in the States. Andy Talley is the Head Football Coach at Villanova Wildcats, and he says: "My athletes really love playing on this surface and I have total confidence in it."

Mick Dennehey, Head Football Coach at Utah State Aggies, agrees: "This is the closest thing to natural grass that we have ever played on."

And the Sprinturf pitch is changing the way people think. "We were reluctant to go with

artificial turf, but Sprinturf has made such advances that the synthetic turf is not like it once was.

"Once we found this wonderful surface, we were convinced that it was the way to go," remarked John Gagliardi, the St. John's University Football coach.

Among those who have installed the surface in the States are the Philadelphia Eagles, the Tennessee Titans, the Ohio State University and the University of San Diego.

"There's no sand in the surface. That eliminates skinning, and, consequently, the pitch will always stay nice and soft," explains Kilmurray.

"The bounce is perfect, even in hurling. The players love playing on it, and the response has been very positive.

"It's the reaction from the players that's the most important thing. And both the footballers and the hurlers are thrilled with it.

"It took us six months to get the work done here at St. Brigid's. It all depends on the amount of ground work that

has to be done. But once that's completed, it goes in fairly rapidly - a period of two to three weeks.

"I'm a football man, and a follower of all sports, so I want to give the players as good a facility as is possible to play on. If that means the pitch is the best in the business, well that's terrific."

Kevin has closed the chapter on his management days at Brigid's and Offaly, but he's delighted his work will keep him very much involved at the coal-face of sport.

As a young fella, he was inspired by the Offaly side of 1961 before a decade later he won two All-Irelands with the county in the company of Offaly legends like Martin Furlong, Willie Bryan and Tony McTague.

Kevin was twice decorated as All-Star in '72 and '73, and for years he managed a team of St. Brigid's All-Stars.

"Yes, we had some wonderful days here. We won Championships all the way up through the grades - under-14, 16, Minor and two under-21.

"We also reached a couple of senior county finals. Unfortunately, we didn't win them, but we won the Senior Division 1 League, so, overall, it was a fantastic era."

Kevin's sons, Ken and Craig, were very much part of it as were names like the Cahills, Declan, Barry and Martin, Peadar Andrews and Declan Lally.

He hopes that the future generations at the club will enjoy their sport even more now on this new state-of-the-art facility.

It's suitable for any sport, and it's excellent drainage, low maintenance and cushion-like surface make it a treasure.

The Dublin County Board were happy when it opened its gates just in time for the Christmas rush.

Of the many matches already played on the sod, people are still praising the quality of the Lucan v Kilmacud U-21 Football Championship final.

And for years to come, the faithful are likely to have more classics to discuss from Kevin Kilmurray's Field of Dreams.