

Sports

Nations Cup will have new dimension at Soccer Centre

Majority of matches will be played on artificial turf

BY MARK BOOTH
mbooth@richmond-news.com

Team speed is more important than ever before when it comes to success at this weekend's Nations Cup.

Thanks to the opening of the Richmond Soccer Centre, the 28th annual multicultural summer tournament will feature the majority of its games on an artificial surface. Both FieldTurf venues will be put to use at Boyd — as will the city's other two fields at Minoru Park and Richmond High.

Purists will argue the "beautiful game" was meant to be played on natural grass. Nations Cup organizers agree to the point where Sunday's Open Division championship game will remain on Boyd's stadium grass field. However, FieldTurf is now recognized as a practical option at the international level and is even in use at the current FIFA U20 World Cup.

"It's a different surface that I think will change the dynamics of the tournament," said Nations Cup committee member Jeff Wilson. "It just creates a faster pace of game and teams with quicker players will thrive on it.

"It definitely has become more standard and more accepted. I think kids are now more accustomed to playing on it than

grass."

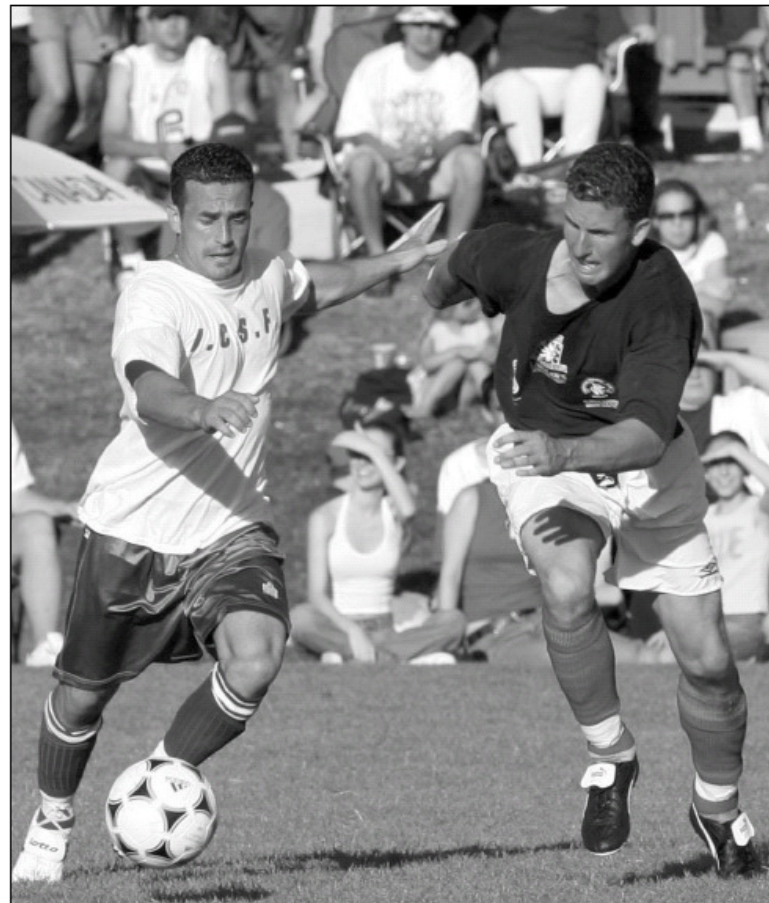
The Richmond Soccer Centre also provides the tournament to be more centralized than ever before thanks to more field options. For the first time in many years, the entire Saturday schedule will take place at Boyd.

"We implemented Friday night games for the first time last year and they went very well," added Wilson. "Now we have the opportunity to use Boyd even more and, by keeping everyone at one park, it should only enhance the atmosphere."

The improved venue does come with a price. For the first time, the tournament is having to pay city user fees for the turf fields. It's brought added attention to the operating budget and additional efforts to increase the event's sponsorships and overall exposure.

Church's Chicken has come on board as a major sponsor and other businesses have stepped forward too. The tournament is also getting coverage on *Channel M* and its new official website — www.thenationscup.com — already had received 14,000 hits in two weeks of operation.

An action packed schedule concludes on Sunday with the Open Division championship game at 5:45 p.m. All games are free to the public.



The 28th annual Nations Cup gets underway on Friday night. The Open Division championship game is slated for 5:45 p.m. on Sunday at Hugh Boyd.