

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL SPORT



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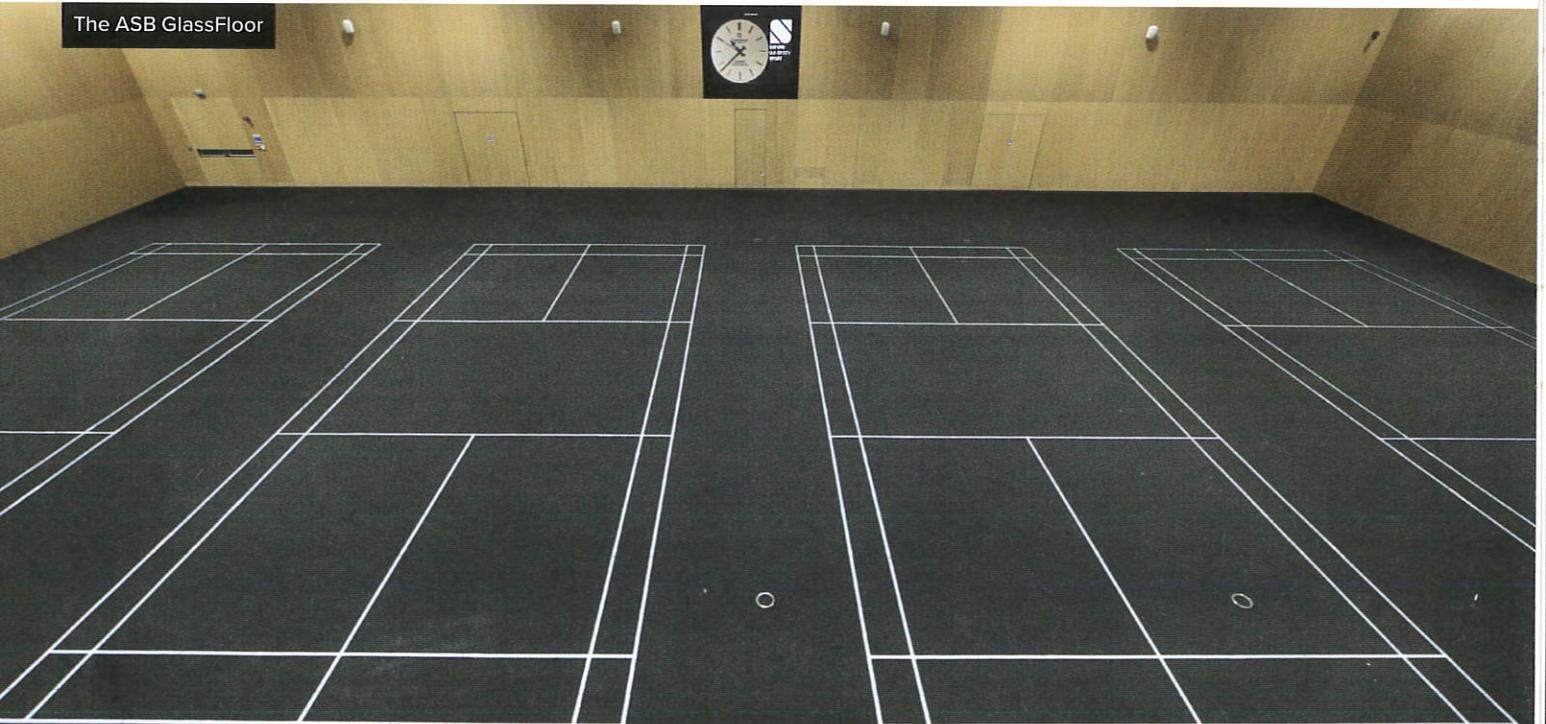


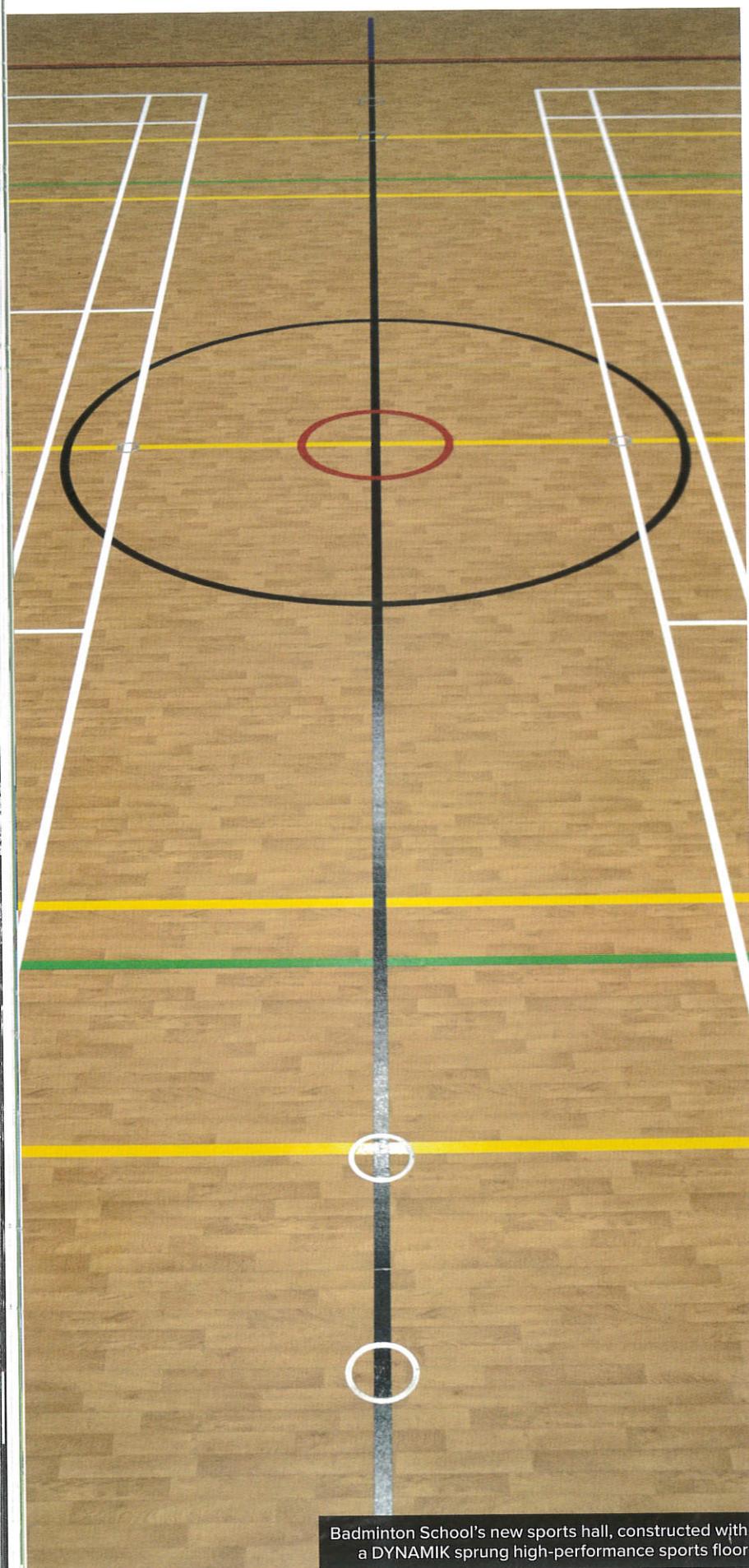
Roedean School's new hockey pitch has been certified to the Independent Hockey Federation (FIH) National Performance Standard

Best foot forward

Steve Wright takes a look at some of the most innovative sports surfacing solutions being taken up across the UK's independent schools and finds out how they are allowing students to thrive →

The ASB GlassFloor





Badminton School's new sports hall, constructed with a DYNAMIK sprung high-performance sports floor

Across the UK, leading independent schools are keeping a keen eye on innovations within the sports surface arena, knowing that the right surface (or portfolio thereof) can vastly enhance both a school's reputation for sporting excellence and its pupils' enjoyment of, and lifelong engagement with, sport.

It's good to see that, currently, innovation is not thin on the ground. DYNAMIK Sport is the UK supplier of the ASB GlassFloor, recently installed at St George's College, Weybridge. The flooring's unique aluminium substructure and custom-made glass surface combine to provide a combination of longevity, adaptability and ease of maintenance.

The ASB GlassFloor also exploits modern LED technology by positioning line markings under the glass surface, meaning that one individual court among many can be illuminated at any given time. Alternatively, a full LED sub-structure can be positioned under the glass surface to provide a more eye-catching visual experience.

The elastic double-layer subfloor consists of a flat aluminium grid that acts as a double spring; the glass is then laid on hard rubber bar rings on top.

The combination of subfloor and glass allows for equal elasticity and shock absorption across the whole surface. The floor's materials – laminated safety glass, ceramic and aluminium – are known for their resistance to climate, corrosion and age. The result is a floor that has a life expectancy in excess of 60 years, far beyond the life of any other sports floor.

The ASB GlassFloor is also low maintenance. "Over a 60-year period, a typical 600 sq m timber sports floor can cost in excess of £340,000 to maintain," explains Craig Jack, commercial director at DYNAMIK Sport.

"This includes a replacement floor together with periodic, sanding, sealing and line marking – but excludes the day-to-day maintenance regime. The ASB GlassFloor only requires the latter: no refinishing is required throughout its life."

American dream

DYNAMIK have recently provided a number of different solutions to schools and colleges with varying sporting needs. At Hartpury University and College, the company installed a polyurethane sprung sports floor system, finished in Conica Conipur AE elastic sports flooring, for the college's new sports hall and biomechanics area.

"The hall's main focuses are netball, futsal, cricket and basketball," explains Marc Richards, Hartpury's assistant director of Elite Sport.

"DYNAMIK's polyurethane floor looks really good with the Hartpury branding on it. It also plays really well – the netball, basketball and futsal squads all love playing on it. The polyurethane surface makes it lightly sprung, so there's a bit of bounce."

"It probably looks more American than your typical sixth-form college or university playing surface – the Hartpury branding in the centre circle, and the colours we chose. DYNAMIK were great at helping us to choose from a wide palette of colours and making sure we got the colour scheme we wanted."

Look good, feel good

Other recent DYNAMIK clients include Badminton School, which enhanced its reputation for sporting excellence with the installation of a new sports hall, constructed with a sprung high-performance sports floor.

Clare Elsley, Badminton School's assistant director of sport and a former England netball player, says the floor needed to be for high-performance sport and suitable for all ages. "We were naturally keen to source the highest-quality playing surface for performance sport, enabling pupils and local partnerships to perform at their best and to train in a facility they are proud of.

"We also wanted to choose a surface that would allow for every age and stage, from grassroots sport through to high-performance competition, without compromising on cost or aesthetics; if a facility looks good then people feel good about using it, it's that simple!"

A sprung synthetic surface was chosen for durability, high-slip resistance and shock absorption.

Elsley says the new floor has improved the standard of sport at the school. "Our pupils love the new surface and as a result, are constantly practising their skills, which has seen our standard of sport improve almost instantly. Our senior netball team were unbeaten in their first season in the new facility, and this is without doubt, because they were inspired to play their best netball in a facility they are proud of, and want to train continuously in to be the best."

It has also attracted local clubs, says Elsley. "Not only have our pupils have been inspired by the sports centre build, but having this surface has also attracted many more local clubs to our campus, which, in turn, has given our students even more

opportunities to extend their sporting activities.

"I believe that without the investment into such surfaces, it would not have been possible to attract the calibre of clubs we have and to provide this level of sport on site for the whole Bristol community. It has raised the school's profile enormously and, as a result, allows us to showcase the very best of Badminton to our city."

Commenting on Badminton's new surface, Jack adds: "The market is veering away from foam-backed vinyl to favouring solid synthetic playing surfaces such as polyurethane installed onto a sprung undercarriage.

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"The main impetus of this trend stems from the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and British Wheelchair Basketball, which recommend these surfaces for their high-durability, indentation resistance and low rolling resistance suitable for wheelchair sport."

New heights

Elsewhere, sports surface specialists S&C Slatter installed a new hockey pitch at Roedean School, which was opened by Olympic gold medallist Helen Richardson-Walsh. The pitch, which has been certified to the Independent Hockey Federation (FIH) National Performance Standard, features a FieldTurf →



St Dunstan's College's Polytan surface is particularly suitable for hockey



Roedean School's hockey pitch

Hockey Gold Elite artificial turf playing surface.

“Great sensitivity and imagination were necessary in the design, due to the technical challenge of the sloping clifftop location and the need to minimise any visual impact on the local environment,” explains the company’s pre-construction manager Ben O’Connor.

“Our solution focused on an extensive cut-and-fill operation, with a series of retaining walls creating construction footprints inset and modelled into the hillside. “Despite the huge amount of excavated material generated by the process, all was retained and re-used on site in accordance with the parameters set by the school and planning authority. This entirely removed the need for costly and disruptive disposal.”

S&C Slatter was also appointed by Eton College to design and build a major new sports development at the college’s Willowbrook Outdoor Sports Centre. “As an FIH Certified Field Builder, we were particularly pleased that the scheme was centred on the provision of new hockey facilities,” O’Connor says.

“S&C Slatter was tasked with providing two sand-dressed artificial grass hockey fields and an accompanying training area – all to FIH National Performance Standard. The selected playing surface was Hockey Gold Elite, from manufacturing partner FieldTurf, laid over a bound rubber shockpad.”

Versatile solution

In the last year, St Dunstan’s College has installed two new innovative Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGA), safeguarding the college’s reputation for sporting excellence.

The surfaces were installed by the award-winning team at Spadeoak, which helped design and build the new facilities. Spadeoak describes the MUGA surface as the ‘ultimate in player convenience’ due to its all-weather playability, versatility and minimal maintenance needs.

The first MUGA was a Polytan surface – suitable for

many sports but in particular hockey, a St Dunstan’s speciality. The second, a porous macadam surface, will be used by the school’s tennis and netball teams.

“The new surfaces have allowed us to provide PE lessons in multiple sports for both junior and senior school pupils – which really helps to enhance the level of sport at the college,” says Gavin Halil, director of St Dunstan’s Enterprises.

“It has also made a huge difference to our pupils,

“The new MUGAS have made a huge difference, both to sporting life at the college and to the facilities available to the wider community”

who no longer have to travel to suitable surfaces, and allows athletes to continue to train in poor weather conditions when traditional pitches are unusable. The MUGAs are also fitted with state-of-the-art floodlights, so can be used for evening training.”

In February, the new MUGA and accompanying football pitches received the Outstanding Sports Facility Award from MyLocalPitch (now PlayFinder), which helps sports players find and book facilities. The organisation praised the ‘state-of-the-art’ facilities that provide ‘fantastic grassroots sporting experience’ to the community.

Halil concludes: “We wanted to continue to provide excellent facilities to both our students and the community around us. Our spaces are used all year round and individuals travel from far to use them. The new MUGAS have made a huge difference, both to sporting life at the college and to the facilities available to the wider community.”