



Kick Off!

At long last the finals of the European Soccer Cup 2000 have arrived. Uniforms of the teams take on great national significance; only in footwear do individual players sometimes have the opportunity to exercise choice.



From the Arctic to the Mediterranean, from the Atlantic to the Urals, football fever hits Europe once again this summer. Between June 10 and July 2, sixteen countries will be battling it out in the finals of 'Euro 2000' - the official title of the European Cup soccer championship. Millions of spectators - most of them in armchairs - will be glued to their TVs, heatedly discussing every facet of this amazing game where twenty-two men chase a ball around a field for 90 minutes while trying to kick it into a net.

A game for millions and a game about millions - of Pounds, Marks, Guilders, Lire, Francs, etc., invested in players and their kit.

Add to that all the paraphernalia, the administering personnel, the supporting roles of fan clubs and management, and behind it all the manufacturers investing millions in development and marketing the products and the game.

But let's begin with that ball. The official matchball for 'Euro 2000' is the Adidas Equipment Terrestro Silverstream. Launched in December 1999, its name is a play on the so-called 'silver streams' - the rivers - of Belgium and The Netherlands, the host countries for the series. Combining the latest technology with its vast experience, Adidas has produced an ultimate performance ball which reacts in a consistent manner no matter what pitch, play or weather condition prevails.



The Adidas Equipment Terrestro Silverstream - The Official Matchball for Euro 2000.

The ball has a layer of highly compressed, gas-filled micro-balloons spaced an equal distance apart (syntactic foam), that return energy in equal measures at all places, whenever the ball is struck.

Long gone are the days of the simple stitched leather cover over an inflatable rubber bladder. Today's soccer ball is as high-tech as any other product on the market, and this particular model is composed of a layer of compressed, gas-filled micro-balloons of syntactic foam, equal in size and in their distance apart. The manufacturers guarantee that the energy return is the same wherever on the surface the ball is struck.

Stringent tests were carried out by EMPA - the Swiss Federal laboratory for material testing and research - to ensure the ball's flight, rebound characteristics, water retention and pressure consistency, before the seal of approval was bestowed by FIFA. The test for shape and size retention involves the ball being shot over 2,000 times against a steel plate at 50km/h. Adidas tested the ETS matchballs first by firing them nearly 5,000 times.

It carries the same graphics as the classic Tango design from Adidas, in use since the World Cup in Argentina in 1978, but differs from that original in almost every other way.

Kick-off

Ready for the kick-off are the latest football boots. Sports shoe manufacturers have come up with different philosophies as to which boot is the most suitable for which condition and they have been developed in collaboration with the star players who will wear them. Most brands have been selected as an individual choice by each player. However, the German team has contracted to wear only Adidas, but even here there is choice in style and performance.

Adidas produced its first soccer boot with nailed leather studs in 1925. Only in 1949 were the three stripes logo and moulded rubber studs used for the first time. In February 2000, the company introduced its Equipment Predator Precision soccer shoe, an engineering feat for the feet of some of the world's leading soccer players, including David Beckham, Patrick Kluivert, Zinedine Zidane and Alessandro Del Piero.

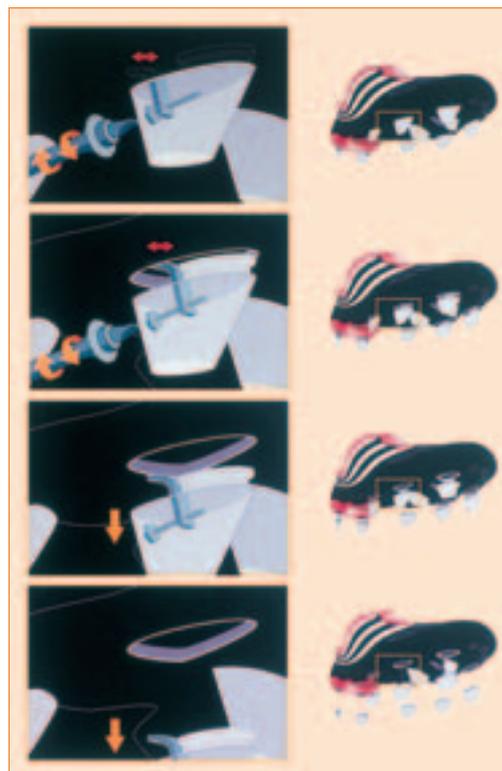
The Predator technology is said to increase accuracy and precision of play, providing players with 20 per cent more swerve, power and control than with standard leather boots. This improvement has been achieved by changing the arrangement of the Predator rubber zones over that part of the foot which provides the power for a shot. Elements in this have also been extended on the medial side of the shoe for greater accuracy when passing or shooting.

Each boot will feature eight replaceable magnesium Traxion studs and two fixed centre studs. For muddy conditions 12mm studs can be replaced with 16mm ones that have a bigger bite. A new lacing system and a tongue asymmetrically shaped to expose as much of the Predator technology as possible, are further innovations which, together with the contoured inlay sole and foot contouring insole board, ensure that the manufacturer's claim of 'manufacturing a shoe to fit exactly the shape of the human foot' is realised.



Nike has come up with a shoe 'package' - three sports shoes for use on different training occasions, and its solution for the 'boot for the match'. The Match Mercurial weighs in at 230gms, is a professional, Italian-made, light boot which will be worn by those players whose style of play is similar to Brazilian star Ronaldo who helped to design it. The lower weight was made possible by the use of the new ultra-lightweight Speed plate (Intetract). This provides optimum traction, stability and flexibility. Material has been shaved away from the arch area to give increased midfoot support - a direct request from Ronaldo.

Puma's Cellerator boots grace the feet of the Czech Republic team.



The replaceable Traxion magnesium stud system in the Adidas Predator boot.



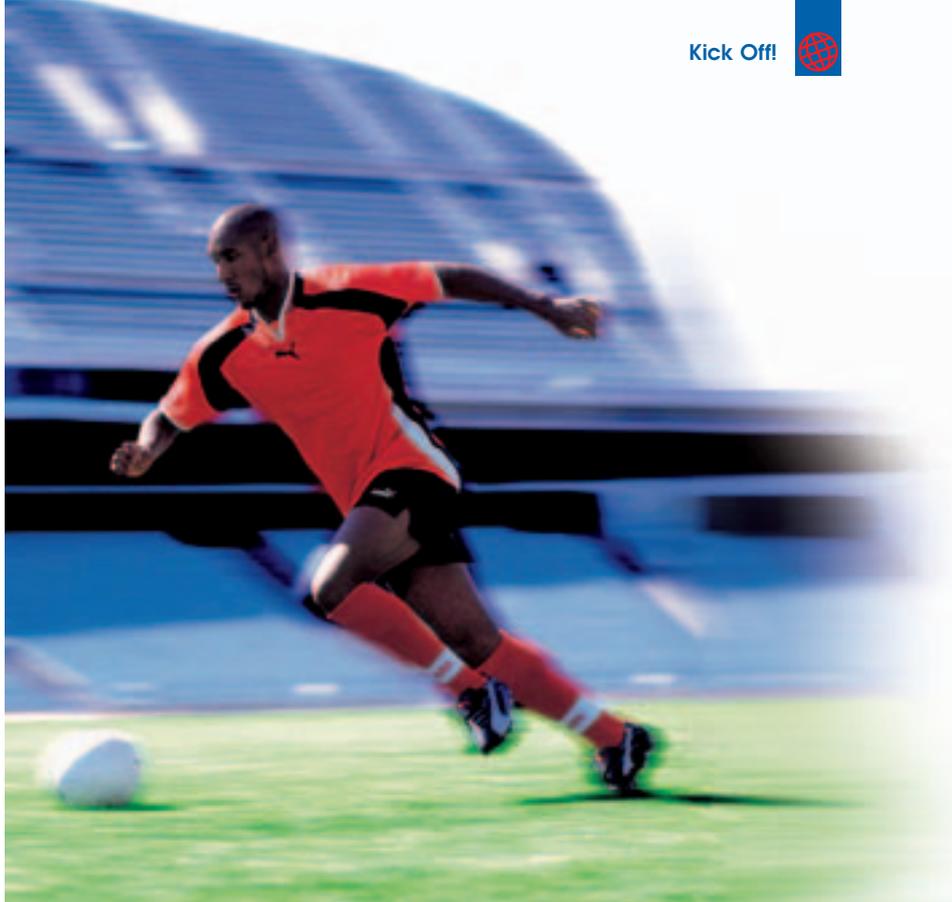
The anatomically correct, moulded sockliner will bring added comfort, while a mesh panel in the tongue and a Dri-Fit application to the backing provide optimum moisture management and breathability.

Second in the package is the five-days a week Air Zoom Mercurial training boot, which is a more robust version of the Match Mercurial. A different plate offers more cushioning and protection, and added Air Zoom benefits players who prefer stability over weight.

The third element is a seven-day football conditioning shoe - Air Max Mercurial, especially constructed for round-the-week off-field training sessions.

Fronting-up midfield for both Juventus, and The Netherlands for "Euro 2000", will be Edgar Davids wearing Nike's Air Zoom Control 90. At 256 gms, made from one-piece KNG 100 - a synthetic lighter than leather - this boot does not stretch but retains its shape. Cushioning is built into the boot's plate, instead of being placed in the sockliner, to protect the foot from stud pressure - an important factor when running for 90 minutes. Improved stud placement, length and wider contact surface provide multi-directional traction and stability. The revolutionary lacing on the side of the boot takes pressure away from the sensitive top area leaving a smooth surface for striking the ball, and the ultra-thin 'first touch' ball control coating completes the innovations in the soccer boot Davids helped design.

From 'Golden Oldie' Pele to 'Golden Boy Wonders' Nicolas Anelka (France and Real Madrid), and Jaap Stam (Holland and Manchester United), Puma top soccer boots have graced the feet of the famous. Millennium Year is no exception and the company is back into team sports sponsorship with a vengeance worthy of the leaping puma image with its new Cellerator soccer line which will be visible on the feet of the Czech Republic team.



Nicolas Anelka (France and Real Madrid) shod by Puma.

For players who are looking to improve their game regardless of weather conditions the Cellerator 'Respira' boot guarantees accurate, controlled movement for the duration of the match. The technology that assures this consists of a Powerframe - to minimise effects of vibration, the e+Cell midsole with improved cushioning component which does not increase the distance from the ground, and a Ground Control double cleat designed to improve stability, acceleration and manoeuvrability. Manufactured in Pittards 80SD Lite leather, the uppers have a lighter kick-off weight, and remain so by absorbing less than 20 per cent of their own weight in moisture as opposed to conventional boots.

Team colours

On the pitch it is the football strip which hits the eye, and the decision as to which manufacturer is chosen to produce apparel is decided by the individual national football federations for their own teams. Innovations here are based on player's comments and a thoroughly scientific approach to problems. One such is Body Mapping - a revolutionary way of charting the human body, highlighting those areas where high volumes of perspiration and more heat is produced. Developed by Nike, the company's designers have taken the research results and incorporated panels of micromesh fabric to increase ventilation at these points. This has been successfully used in football strips as worn by the Dutch, Belgian and Portuguese teams in the Euro 2000 competition. The micromesh gives additional comfort to the high-performance Dri-Fit pique material - a lightweight double-knit fabric noted for its moisture management properties - used in Nike football shorts and shirts.



Nike's Dri-Fit fabrics incorporated into match strips for the Dutch and Belgian national squads.



As one of the host teams for Euro 2000, the Dutch strip is a very bright Safety Orange shirt and black shorts - colours which proved a winning combination for the Dutch in the World Cup of 1974. The 'away' uniform in American Blue shorts and shirt is another change made by Nike which has sponsored the Dutch team since 1996.

Co-host Belgium, also sponsored by Nike, will stand out in a True Red strip for home and black for their away matches, again in the new Nike fabric, as will the Portuguese national team in Team Red at home and white shirt and shorts for away games.

But it is not only the materials and colours which are new. Great attention has been given to details and finish to ensure that shirts and shorts are more comfortable. The jerseys are engineered so that all the seams are flat, clean and non-abrasive, and the curved hemming ensures that players are not distracted from the game.

Cutting lean figures on the pitches this summer will be the players from a dozen national teams around the world wearing Puma Slim Fit shirts from its 2000 Cellerator apparel range. USP Moisture Management technology ensures a controlled body climate, and Intellimesh is an effective thermo-ventilation system to keep players drier, cooler and fresher for longer.

Innovative technology is used by Puma in goalkeepers' gloves and shinguards, as well as in a lightweight training line for players, all part of its Cellerator Line.

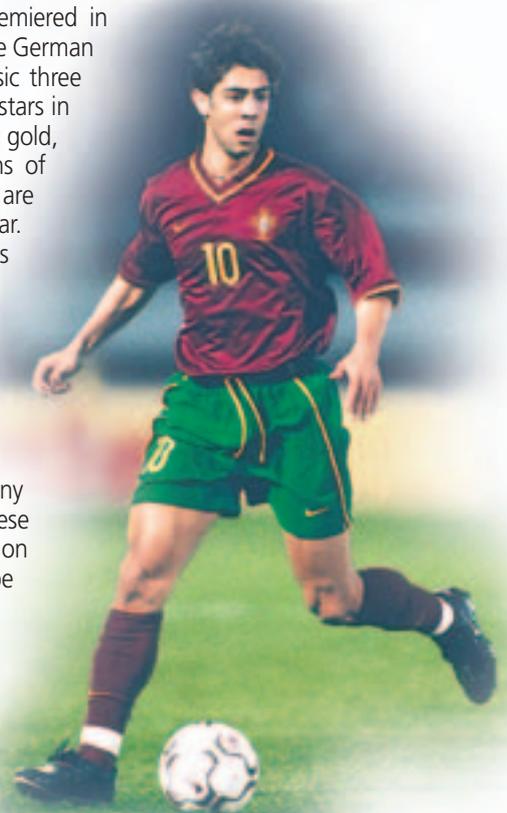
Adidas is clothing eight of the last 16 teams in the Euro 2000 competition as well as the referees, functionaries and helpers. ClimaLite is its answer to the jersey question - a high-tech fabric which served well in the World Cup 1998 matches and now appears in new designs with mesh insert APV (anatomically placed ventilation) - an extra boost to body microclimate especially in critical heat zones.

The new German tricots were premiered in March in a friendly match between the German national team and Croatia. The classic three stripes are this time accompanied by stars in the German colours of black, red and gold, indicating the three World Cup wins of 1954, '74 and '90, and these colours are repeated on the neckline and collar. Other national teams to wear Adidas jerseys are France, Spain, Sweden, Romania, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Slovenia.

All manufacturers will be producing replica national football jerseys for fans in equally up-to-date fabrics, along with a host of fan articles for each nation. Just how many football jerseys will be produced by these companies for each team depends on the individual contract. We should be seeing some interesting new ideas in colours and fabrics and hopefully some interesting, good clean football matches. 🌐

Puma's range of shirts for the Czech Republic team.

Rui Costa in Nike's Portuguese home strip.



Kay Turtle