



# SUPPLY SIDE

## FLOORING MADE EASY

By: Steve Chase

Our Supply Side column offers expert advice from suppliers to help give you an insider edge with your upcoming facility purchases and expenditures. In each issue, OSF editors will provide an industry expert to give you the insight on how to ask the "right questions" for product and service purchases for your facility. This won't make you an expert, but will give you the knowledge to ask those right questions when you are in the purchase mode. Send your specific topic requests and questions to us at [editor@onsite-fitness.com](mailto:editor@onsite-fitness.com), and we'll get you an expert answer.

### FLOORING MADE EASY

**ONSITE FITNESS:** Purchasing flooring for basketball, aerobics and racquetball areas is a large expenditure for a facility. There are numerous options available, and it can be hard for facilities to know what to look for when purchasing these types of floors. Do you have any advice as to what to consider in the selection process?

**FITNESS FLOORING:** There are indeed a lot of factors and options to consider when selecting these types of floors. You can look not only at traditional wood flooring, of which there are a myriad of options, but, for some areas, you can also consider a number of synthetic systems.

Let's look at wood flooring first, since it is what we most commonly associate with court sports, such as basketball, volleyball, racquetball, etc. Wood flooring is the tried-and-true material for gyms for more than 100 years now. It's durable, attractive and easy to maintain.

Wood flooring is typically made up of a resilient layer underneath the surface and the robust hardwood surface that we see on the face of the playing area. And there's a dizzying array of what is underneath a wood floor. One flooring manufacturer has 18 unique constructions in their catalog, so it can be a challenge for a facility to select which is best for their application.

But we can break flooring systems down into two main categories: the nailed-in variety, in which the floorboards are nailed into a hard substructure with a resilient layer beneath that substructure, and the "free floating" floor system, which is usually prefinished boards clipped or glued together directly over foam. Nailed-in floors typically need to be sanded and finished immediately after installation, while free-floating floors are almost always



prefinished, making for a quicker installation time. The nailed-in system is more common for basketball, while a free-floating one is more commonly found in group exercise, although you'll find both types in both applications. For both applications, there are some important criteria to keep in mind. In most court sports, you need to make sure that you have a solid surface, so that the ball will bounce correctly. You need to have some degree of shock absorption, too, so as to reduce the impact of jumping. You also need to have proper traction, so that athletes can stop quickly, pivot and slide their feet without hindrance. Luckily, there is a standard developed in Germany known as the DIN Standard that evaluates all of these criteria, and it is accepted worldwide in the sports flooring industry. Every sports flooring manufacturer in the U.S. has had their floors tested under the DIN Standards and will be more than willing to show you the results for each flooring system.

As long as the floor system you've selected meets all of the criteria of the DIN standards, you know that you've selected a floor that is as safe and performs as well as can be expected of any sports floor. Now, some manufacturers may show you floors that have passed some of the criteria, but not all, so be aware that there is a difference between being DIN tested and exceeding all criteria. It's okay if you want a floor that does not pass every test, as these floors should also perform well and are typically slightly cheaper. Just be aware that there is a difference between being DIN tested and DIN certified.

**OSF:** Okay, but what about the synthetic options that you talked about earlier?

**FITNESS FLOORING:** Synthetics have increased in popularity quite a bit in the last few years. They basically break down into polypropylene tile floors, poured-in-place urethane rubber systems, sheet rubber flooring and foam-backed PVC sheets. These floors are typically used where a wood floor just won't perform well, for instance, in areas where there is no way to control the

humidity, where regular water leaks occur or in multi-use spaces where the possibility of damaging the floor is a regular possibility, such as if the area is used for banquets as well as sports. In all of these cases, wood flooring is expensive and time consuming to repair, whereas most of these synthetic alternatives are not.

But if you're looking at these systems as an inexpensive alternative to hardwood, you'll find that they aren't exceptionally less expensive than hardwood - with the possible exception of the polypropylene tiles. The rest typically fall into the \$7- to \$9-per-square-foot range, and you'll likely be able to find a hardwood system that is not substantially more than that. If you can afford a hardwood floor, you'll also likely find that it will have a longer life span and can be refinished a number of times, which makes the surface look like new each time.

Still, if you wish to consider synthetic options, you should be looking at such factors as ball bounce, resilience and traction characteristics, as you would a wood floor. Likely these systems have passed some of the DIN criteria, but not all of them. But they certainly will have some test results.

**OSF:** That's a good analysis of court sport flooring, but what about group exercise? It has totally different demands on it, doesn't it?

**Fitness Flooring:** Yes, that's true. What we used to call the aerobics room has now been renamed group exercise, because there are so many varied activities that go on in there today. You've got numerous aerobic-type classes, but also mind-body activities like yoga and tai-chi, as well as group cycling and group rowing, to name just a few. Each has unique requirements for flooring.

While proper traction and stability are extremely important in these activities, you can disregard ball bounce and, instead, replace it with the need for more shock absorption. In aerobics,



there are more impact points, and the impacts are more rapid, so the floor needs to respond quickly and in a smaller area. There's a DIN standard unique to group exercise, which takes in many of the criteria of the court sport standards, but also evaluates specific needs of a group exercise participant.

Of course, some of these group activities require very little resilience. Spinning and yoga, for instance, require an extremely stable surface, but there is seldom any impact on the floor. That's one of the reasons why you see fewer carpet-over-foam floors in group exercise any more: They were great for absorbing shock, but did not have the stable surface that many of the activities in group exercise require now.

That's why wood systems have become the flooring of choice in aerobics, and, typically, they are free-floating floors that react more quickly to individual impacts occurring at many points on the floor at the same time. They're also very stable and durable and hold up well to other activities.

## FLOORING SELECTION C R I T E R I A

### SITE CONSIDERATIONS

- Can you control the climate in the room that you're installing the floor in? If you can't control the humidity or have regular water problems, wood flooring is likely not your best bet.
- Do you plan to have regular social functions with tables and chairs in that room? If so, and if you're planning on having a wood floor, it's advisable to also purchase a removable gym floor cover.
- What type of budget do you have for the project? There are less expensive options than wood, but wood typically has a longer life span.



## PRODUCT CONSIDERATIONS

- Has the manufacturer given you information on testing results? Remember that there's a difference between DIN tested and DIN certified.
- Have you received references from the manufacturer and called them? Ask them how the company has responded to any problems, how the floor has worn, how easy it is to maintain, etc.
- Is the floor designed for the activities you're planning on conducting in that room? Not all floors are alike, so you need to make sure that it has the proper resilience or ball bounce for the activities that you plan to hold in that room.
- Do you know what type of appearance you're looking for (especially important if you're considering a synthetic floor, since they are available in a wide range of options)?

## INSTALLATION

- Has the manufacturer been clear about who will install the floor? Certain systems have to be installed by manufacturer-trained installers, while on-site staff can install others.
- Has the manufacturer given you exact time frames? They should give you precise dates when the materials will arrive and when their crews will begin the install.
- Has the manufacturer given you an idea of how long installation will take? If you're on a tight time frame, a prefinished wood floor or a synthetic floor will likely be faster.
- Does the product cost include installation? The labor involved to install a floor and subsequently sand and finish it can be nearly as expensive as the materials themselves.
- Who warrants the install? If anything goes wrong along the way, will you be able to call the manufacturer, or will you have to track down the installation crew? **OSF**



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