



**COMMUNITY
RUGBY**

FACILITIES GUIDANCE NOTE 3

**MAINTENANCE
OF GRASS PITCHES
FOR RUGBY**



**RUGBY FOOTBALL
FOUNDATION**

INTRODUCTION

Facilities Guidance Note 2 lays out the essential and necessary processes that clubs should follow when improving, upgrading or constructing a new pitch. This work will have been carried out by a contractor and supervised by the club's appointed consultant. Once this type of project is completed and clear of the contractual defects period, ground staff should follow the maintenance regime laid down by the contract. This Guidance Note concentrates upon the maintenance and upkeep of existing grass pitches.

PERFORMANCE QUALITY STANDARDS

Knowledge of your local ground conditions and existing pitch drainage is essential, together with the current and future demand and usage. This will include matches, training and mini rugby. Is there an irrigation scheme? Is it pumped? Once a realistic level of quality and standard has been chosen for a particular pitch, then the club and ground staff should endeavour to achieve the desired results through the effective management of the pitch. It is recognised that standards and desired parameters will probably not be achieved all of the time, especially as the season progresses. However, the intent should be to aspire to these standards throughout the whole year.

The Institute of Groundsmanship's 'IOG PERFORMANCE QUALITY STANDARDS - RUGBY' document lays out in detail a range of methods that can be used in testing the performance of a rugby pitch.

GROUND STAFF TRAINING

The RFU are committed to raising the knowledge of ground staff relating to the effective maintenance of grass pitches. The RFU, in partnership with the Institute of Groundsmanship, subsidises the cost of

winter pitch training courses for groundsmen (see page 6 for contact details).

EQUIPMENT AND MACHINERY

Maintenance equipment and machinery can be purchased or, where appropriate, hired. Investing in good quality, up-to-date equipment will greatly increase efficiency and make maintenance work less time consuming. Clubs should set aside a budget for new equipment, annual servicing and replacement of worn out implements. Machinery can be hired out and clubs may also contract the work out, saving on initial capital costs and the problems associated with maintaining the equipment and safe storage. Essential equipment for successful maintenance includes the following:

Essential equipment and machinery

- Mower - various models fulfil different requirements. Cylinder mowers produce a better quality finish
- Chain harrow/roller - to break up clumps and re-level the surface. Heavy rolling is no longer considered suitable due to adverse effects on the root zone
- Tractor
- Line marking equipment
- Hand tools - spade, fork, half moon brush, drag brush, edging shears, wheelbarrow and measuring equipment
- Stockpile of sand, medium fine, good draining sand - to be used on wet areas to help save fixtures. Suitable sands (medium sands) range from particle size of 0.125mm to 1.0mm (whose principle particle range is between 0.25mm and 0.75mm) for amelioration and top dressing of winter pitch surfaces.

Expensive equipment may be hired as and when required.

- Aerator - tractor mounted or pedestrian
- Sprayer - for application of liquid fertiliser and pesticides. Health and safety reasons may make it preferable to buy in this work through a contractor, as spraying requires a licence.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Clubs should be fully aware of their responsibilities and duties under the Health and Safety at Work, etc Act 1974 and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994 (COSHH) (refer to page 6).

This Guidance Note does not seek to provide detailed information and guidance regarding this topic, but key issues and risk assessment should include the following:

- Safe methods of working are set and followed
- Machinery and equipment is properly maintained and safe to use
- Equipment and harmful substances are used properly and stored safely
- Employees are provided with training, information and supervision for them to work safely
- First aid and accident reporting procedures
- Sports equipment - post protectors and flexible corner poles
- Risk assessments in removing and erecting goal posts (the IOG endorses the Hinged Post System)
- Inspections and maintenance of ground sockets (i.e. 900mm cube of concrete for a 915mm deep socket).

Clubs should review assessments regularly and keep their records and procedures up to date.

TYPICAL MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE

Much will depend upon your local ground conditions, seasonal weather conditions (particularly rainfall), land drainage and adjacent topography, programme of use, irrigation, equipment and machinery. Further advice and guidance can be obtained from the organisations and agencies listed in “Useful contacts” on page 6.

SEPTEMBER

The start of the season. Keep on top of the mowing (aiming to maintain the grass height

at between 50mm and a maximum of 75mm during the season) as there will still hopefully be a good amount of growth. If at all possible, chain harrow the pitch after each weekend. This will stand the grass up, replace a few of the divots from the games and is a great way to put a good pattern on the pitch.

Do not roll with anything heavier than the mowers you mow the pitch with.

OCTOBER

The mowing will still need to be done. Make sure that the grass is being cut properly by ensuring that the blades are correctly set to cut and that it is not too wet on the leaf to mow. It is always good to chain harrow when there is morning dew on the grass. This knocks off the wet and leaves you with a brilliant pattern.

Look to apply your autumn and winter feed towards the end of the month, something like 3-12-12 (nitrogen-phosphate-potash), low in nitrogen, high in phosphate and high in potash to strengthen cell walls and roots of the grass. Use the weather forecast as a guide. Do not fertilise if frost is forecast and preferably before rain is forecast. Have a couple of hand forks available to hand fork away any surface water on match days. The referee will be grateful of his/her touch-judges’ runs being hand forked on the morning of a wet match day.

NOVEMBER

The weather may now be breaking to give a lot more rain. **Now is the time to give the pitches a good spiking albeit with a slitter or aerator.** Do it on a dry day, if possible, and leave that pattern in for the weekend’s games. The last cut of the year may well be this month. If the weather was to stay mild, you may get a little growth, but one or two frosts at night tend to stop most growth.

DECEMBER

Typically one of the hardest months for a groundsman. Try to keep machinery off the pitches as much as possible. If you can, chain harrow the pitches in two directions - the earlier in the week the better. That way, you have replaced the divots, put a pattern on and now have no need to go onto the pitch apart from marking it out.

If there is a cold snap, try to roll the pitch with the mower. It will help to save matches if the surface is flat. A well-grassed pitch will cope better than a bare one. Make a decision in the club as to your policy: do you want to be playing on frost-bound pitches?

If you need to play a game and the forecast is for frost, use a mower roller after you have chain harrowed the pitch. Use the stockpile of sand to top dress any areas that may be rutted after scrums, rucks or mauls. Two men and a wheelbarrow can move and spread a fair amount of sand. If you work as a team, you can be chain harrowing and spreading sand at the same time.

If, however, you decide that it is too hard to play, keep off the pitch and let the referee see that it is rutted and unplayable.

JANUARY

Very often the coldest month. Go onto the grass only when necessary. Keep players off in either very wet or very cold conditions. Use the harrow and mower roller only when you have to. Hand fork any standing water away before it freezes. **If the weather allows, get another spiking done.**

FEBRUARY

Wet and cold again. Do try to keep fixtures played by chain harrowing and rolling with the mower. **Make sure that you do spike with the slitter or aerator again this month.** Having rolled the pitch with the mower for a few weeks now, the surface will have become compacted so it needs the aerator. This is imperative at this time of the year.

As the end of the month nears, the weather may warm up a little. If funds allow, look to order another feed (6-0-12).

MARCH

Put on a feed if the weather allows. 6-0-12 is recommended, medium nitrogen, no phosphate, high potash to strengthen roots and encourage top growth whilst maintaining feed to the roots. The grass will begin to grow, so it may be time to give it a cut later on in the month.

Start to plan and organise what remedial works you think you are going to be doing at the end of April. You can order a hard-wearing grass seed (mixture of 3 or 4 Rye grass seeds - refer to your contractor for guidance). Feed, top dress and also speak to your contractor as to his availability the day after your last game.

APRIL

If at all possible, try and get your cutters down to around 40mm. This will allow you to work the seed into the soil much easier when you begin the remedial work at the end of the month. Get the last match date in your mind and sort everything out to happen as soon as possible after the final whistle of the last game of the season. Have your contractor in the very next day as the sand that you have already ordered is being delivered that morning. Ensure that things like the seed and feed are on site before you stop playing. You need to catch any spring showers that are around for the next month in order to achieve the best results.

APRIL/MAY - REMEDIAL WORKS

Using a tractor with grassland tyres, spread the sand dressing onto the pitches. Make sure that it is spread evenly and that any low or bad areas get a bit more sand. **Deep spike the whole of every pitch to a depth of 8-10in spikes at 4in centres.** Brush and chain harrow as much of the sand into all the holes and low spots. Once the sand dress has been dragged and brushed to a level you are satisfied with, then you can begin to seed. A disc seeder would be best as it cuts, lifts and drops the seed into the ground and rolls it flat again in one pass.

This will ensure that the seed is in the ground at the right depth and covered, ready to grow. Then apply a good feed of 10-15-10. This is a well balanced feed - high nitrogen, enough phosphate to last until November and enough potash to keep the roots growing. Spread evenly across the pitch and then roll with the mower to make sure that the seed is in contact with the soil. Then irrigate as soon as possible or wait for it to rain. Growth will be visible in about 10-12 days.

MAY

Try and keep the surface moist to allow the best growing conditions. Irrigate if possible during dry spells. Keep off the pitch for at least a fortnight. Then, just cut it at about 50mm with a rotary mower if possible. Do cut once a week after that in different directions. This will help the seedling to tiller and to form a plant much faster. You can let the clippings fly once again.

JUNE

Keep on top of the mowing. Let it begin to grow out to 75mm towards the end of the month. If there is a dry spell, try and keep the areas irrigated. This will be difficult to do if it is a long dry spell, but the more grass you can keep now the better it will be later on in the season.

JULY

A summer feed would be of benefit. A 12-0-9 would be recommended, high in both nitrogen to boost grass growth and potash to strengthen roots. It will also have a trace of iron which will toughen up the grass for the summer.

Mowing and watering will be the main task. Get a strimmer and do as much mowing of the outside of the pitches as possible, covering general maintenance of the ground's perimeter and goal posts. Make the place as tidy as you can, including other non-pitch grass areas. If it is dry, it will not grow back as quickly and the whole ground will look attractive to any newcomers.

AUGUST

Begin to get ready for the season ahead. Check all goal post and sockets for safety. It may be 12 months since anyone looked at these posts. Mark the pitch lines out using a safe paint. At this time of the year, lines are either being cut out, washed out or grown out. Consider using a product such as the Preline paint sold by LineMark UK. This has a growth retardant in it that will help you to maintain your lines safely. There are a number of injuries every year caused by people using weed killers or creosote mixed with marking paint, so please adhere to health and safety guidance when marking.

Keep the mowing going and irrigate if you need to. Restrict the training to identified areas and rotate repetitive practices. Do not let the coaches ruin a season's work by being too keen in the summer! If the training areas start to wear out, give them extra sand and perhaps a watering and a feed. They are intensely used at this time of year, but need to be looked after. The longer they train off the pitch the better.

IN SUMMARY

Do stand at the clubhouse and see just how good the pattern of your pitch is. Make sure that you stripe it up and paint your white lines as straight as possible. Everyone who comes into the ground will see what you see, so try and look at it with a newcomer's eye.

The key is to look after your pitch properly. The biggest and most important job is to aerate it as often as you can. Begin to look for a spiker of your own to supplement the use of the soil reliever.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Kent". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Keith Kent, RFU Head Groundsman

PUBLICATIONS

An Introduction to IOG Performance Quality Standards

Institute of Groundmanship
28 Stratford Office Village
Walker Avenue
Wolverton Mill East
Milton Keynes MK12 5TW
Tel: 01908 312511
www.iog.org

Performance Quality Standards - Rugby

Institute of Groundmanship
(as above)

Natural Turf for Sport - Design Guidance Note

Sport England Publications
PO Box 255
Wetherby LS23 7LZ
www.sportengland.org

USEFUL CONTACTS

Institute of Groundmanship (IOG) (as above)

Sports and Play Construction Association (SAPCA)

Federation House
Stoneleigh Park
Warwickshire CV8 2RF
Tel: 024 7641 6316
www.sapca.org.uk

National Playing Fields Association (NPFA)

Stanley House
St Chad's Place
London WC1X 9HH
Tel: 020 7833 5360
www.npfa.co.uk

Published in March 2006 by
Rugby Football Development Limited

Pitchcare.com Limited

The Technology Centre
Wolverhampton Science Park
Wolverhampton
West Midlands WV10 9RU
Tel: 01902 824 392
www.pitchcare.com

Rugby Football Union (RFU)

Rugby House
Rugby Road
Twickenham TW1 1DS
Tel: 0208 892 2000
www.rfu.com

Sport England

3rd Floor Victoria House
Bloomsbury Square
London WC1B 4SE
Tel: 08458 508 508
www.sportengland.org

Health and Safety Executive

Information Centre
Magdalen House
Trinity Road
Bootle
Merseyside L20 3QZ
Tel: 08701 545 500
www.hse.gov.uk

This Guidance Note is part of a series published by the Rugby Football Union (RFU) and Rugby Football Foundation (RFF). Whilst every effort has been made by the RFU/RFF to ensure that the contents are accurate, the RFU/RFF disclaims all warranties, express or implied, as to the accuracy of the information contained in this Guidance Note. The information is intended solely as a guide and should be augmented where necessary by professional advice.

The RFU/RFF shall not be liable for any loss or damage whatsoever arising from the use of or reliance on the information contained in this Guidance Note.

The RFU/RFF reserves the right to amend or withdraw the information contained in this Guidance Note at any time.



Rugby Football Development Limited

Rugby House, Rugby Road, Twickenham TW1 1DS
Tel: 0870 405 2000 Fax: 0870 405 2009
Email: communityrugbyinfo@rfu.com
Web: www.rfu.com