

7 ways to maintain a safe playing surface

BY KEVIN VOS, CSFM

The Muscatine Soccer Complex is an 8-field, 41-acre area that is totally surrounded by 7-foot chain link fence. All activity is scheduled on a reserved basis only. We do not allow drop in usage. The complex has wide concrete paved walkways for the spectators and teams to get to their respective fields. These walkways also serve as paths for the maintenance vehicles to each field. For various games and/or tournaments, we will control how close the spectators get to the field by roping off the field. We have permanent and movable bleachers for some fields. Currently, we do not allow any other type of activity but soccer in our complex.

Despite these precautions, one of our biggest challenges has been overuse of the fields. We try to maintain a high-level, safe playing surface. For the soccer fields, the high-use areas are the goal areas, middle of the playing field, ref lines along the touchlines for three-referee system, and team areas. Each year these areas are consistently getting worn from overuse. There seems to be a public perception that if there are not total worn out areas on the fields, you must not be having enough activity. My #1 goal is to provide the safest playing surface possible with the budget I have. I try to maintain it all season long, not just for certain events. Our complex is open from approximately April 1 to November 1. We average 900-1,000 games/scrimmages and 20-22 various size tournaments per season for eight fields. So every year there is a little more activity to keep the pressure on to see how far the fields can be pushed.

To maintain this safe playing surface, we do several things.

1. We constantly educate the teams, coaches about moving warm up activity around the field and not to use one place all the time. We tell them why this is necessary.

2. I also continue to educate and communicate with my superiors, various city personal, council members, mayor, etc., on various needed turf management practices and complex rules and the need for the fields to rest and recuperate at certain times of the season.

3. We have a complex-wide rule: "No warming up in the goal box area." This is before games and for all groups. For those goalies who need warm ups, we place practice goals at various places by each field. These goals are moved each day/event.

4. Turf management practices include doing extra aerification, overseeding and topdressing in those high-use areas. Aerification will be with solid or coring tines depending on when the next scheduled activity is, and if we are overseeding too. Sometimes during our busiest part of the season, we are aerifying



Photos courtesy of Kevin Vos

some field/high-use area every week. Aerification is important to us! We are constantly seeding in some form throughout the season. We do this by slit seeding, broadcasting it in the spots, or putting down divot mix. Depending on

the temperatures, time of the season, and degree of the worn area, we will pre-germinate the seed. We seed before the area is totally worn out. We never want to get behind on this and have dirt areas. Tournaments and, of course, wet playing conditions are the worst for quick damage. For some tournaments, there are anywhere from 8 to 12 games played on a field in 48 hours. This puts intense use on the turf in a short amount of time.

5. Depending on the number of games, age group, time of the year, games played in wet conditions or not, we will move the sidelines in or out 3 feet at a time and/or move the entire field, shifting it north-

south or east-west. We are fortunate to have enough overall area (minimum of 2.5 acres "field" area) to have a playing field laid out in. This oversized area allows us to shift fields before the turf is totally worn out. After moving the

field we will aerify, seed and topdress the high-use areas.

6. I think one of the most important things to do is not allow practices on your game fields. We do allow various controlled scrimmages, 1-2 per week, by the high school teams and club teams.

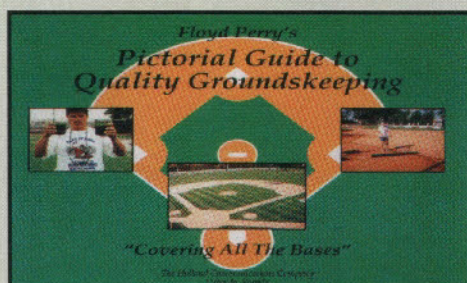
7. Rest the fields. At some time in the year, usually in July, use is less demanding. We usually only have 1 or 2 fields being played on per week. We rotate and rest the fields for this month.

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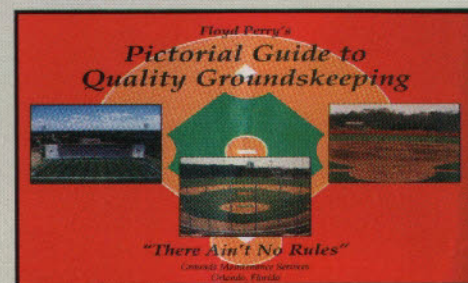
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