

# Spring sports' headache: water

By Floyd Perry

Today many major athletic conferences require a full infield tarp to save weekend series and the team's travel expenses from being washed away. That's fine for the big boys but what about the rest of us, in parks and recreation and high school? How do we create an opportunity to play after some serious rain and how do we dry a field once the game has started?

There are a couple of ways that might help but they're not diesel fuel, gasoline, sawdust, or helicopters. Over the past fifteen years, since I've been traveling the country educating groundskeepers and viewing more than 18,000 athletic facilities, many turf managers have created some easy to use and inexpensive means to solve the "down water" problem. Farmers and construction personnel have used some of the methods for years as their workday is very valuable to the success of the end product. As groundskeepers, many of us are using time-tested means from other industries on our clay infield surfaces with the same rate of success to the end product: playing the game!

Two parts of the water removal issue are: a) elimination of standing water in large and small puddle sizes and then, b) the drying of saturated or moist clay surfaces so the game can begin or continue after the majority of the water has been eliminated.

Let's begin the water removal problem before the season starts and before the rain falls by incorporating calcined clay (MVP, a coarse particle calcined clay) into the top four to six inches with a RotaDairon machine, for example, which creates a superior blend at one ton per 1000 square feet. By accomplishing this task during October, November or December, you will be able to see the highs and lows of the playing surface and areas that may need extra attention during your preseason window.

## Second move

The second part of your preseason infield preparation is the drilling of a series of French drains or drilling and filling in areas that you know are low from previous season's thunder showers. Both of these techniques use MVP, which creates a test tube wicking action from surface to subsurface in a relatively short timeframe.

One gallon of water weighs 8.34 pounds and will percolate vertically if the clay soil affords that ability. A 1 1/2-inch layer of clay over these openings allows for quality infield performance and successful daily dragging and repair. Both techniques also work very well on outfield turf surfaces that are compacted and hold water.



Avoid using sawdust!



Sponge to absorb surface water

The third part of your preliminary clay preparation work is laser leveling your surface to create a percentage pitch for water runoff. Laser leveling has some super effects for short-term performance but as the daily dragging and raking take place, the grade is eliminated or altered due to surface reshaping.

As the season is about to start, the key to your rainy day attack is to be prepared for the worst, but be ready for anything. A couple of little tricks that have proved successful for coaches, team members and groundskeepers are in the accompanying pictures. Try everything once then settle in on what works best for you on your fields, under your weather conditions and with your staff's equipment and supplies.

**A.** Have Turface ready to go and in a location that is close to the playing site. Both calcined MVP and QuickDry are necessary for all conditions of moisture.

**B.** Have your small tools (blow pack, sponge, sump pump, leaf rakes) in storage and gassed up and ready for a thunder buster.

**C.** Have your grooming vehicles ready in case the water removal process takes place after the scheduled workday. One 3-wheeler with the correct rear attachment is worth five staff members with leaf rakes.



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Sponge roller on mesh biber

Many of these photos only cover parts of the water removal process. Turf managers across the country have tricks that work for them their respective areas that may not work elsewhere. Attempt to communicate with your neighbors. Don't be afraid to ask questions and don't be limited to just one or two ways to "skin a cat."

Rainwater is tough but today's progressive turf managers are leading the charge to solve "our biggest maintenance headache."

*Floyd Perry, Jr., is president of Grounds Maintenance Services in Orlando. He received the STMA's Dick Ericson Award in January, which honors a sports turf manager who positively impacts the sports turf industry and exhibits effective team leadership. He can be reached at 407-903-1220. ■*



Blow-pack to move surface water

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