

From the Sidelines



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Coaches: a fact of life

Jesse Pritchard, CSFM, University of Virginia emailed me this response in mid-February regarding an article for next month:

"I would call the weather situation we are in here [UVA] a crisis. The Mid-Atlantic region has received record amounts of snowfall this winter . . . It has been an interesting process explaining to both our head baseball and softball coaches that their opening games are in serious jeopardy of being canceled due to the snow.

"Coaches have different personalities, and these two are no different. Our baseball coach is adamant about playing on the field to the point where it's nearly play at all costs. I understand this and have to steer him in the direction that will help him play as soon as possible and save the integrity of playing surface at the same time; this is usually a huge compromise on his part. Our softball coach wants to get on the field as early as possible but understands the investment athletics has made in her field and wants to do nothing to damage it.

"I need to use thoughtful communication and pull from a background of trust that I have developed with my coaches to make them comfortable with how the field crew will make their fields playable. The relationships I have developed with our coaches go a long way in determining how green the grass appears and how true the ball bounces!"

This arrived shortly after I had also swapped emails with University of Oregon women's soccer head coach Tara Erickson, about her perspective of working with her turf manager:

What are your expectations as a coach regarding playability and availability of your practice and game fields?

"Here at the University of Oregon we are fortunate to have an exceptional game and practice field for our use during our fall competitive season. Our field is so well maintained that we are able to practice and compete on the field daily with very limited wear and tear. We would hope that no amount of weather or wear would force us to alter our game or practice plans . . . even though we live in the rainy Northwest!"

What works best for you in terms of communicating with your turf manager?

"As a coach you always take pride in being a good communicator, but so often we are stretched thin with various daily commitments, so a ground manager that actively seeks us out is ideal. This doesn't have to be everyday but as frequently as possible."

How disruptive is it when coaches are asked to vary practice routines to protect turf?

"As a coach this can be very detrimental to our overall goals for the practice. Because our game is played on the ground it can be extremely difficult to change fields, surfaces, etc."

What is your advice for other coaches with respect to dealing with turf managers and their concerns?

"I think the best approach is to be straight forward and communicate your goals and needs as a program. If our turf manager knows how important he/she is to these goals and needs most of the time we can work together. Every now and then we are told no or that plans need to change but at least if the communication is there we can move forward with a good approach."

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