

SPORTS TURF MANAGER

... for better, safer Sports Turf

DECEMBER 1999

VOLUME 12 ♦ ISSUE 4

Winter Sports Turf: Levels of Play

The wet conditions of the past winter (and spring) highlight many of the challenges faced by turf managers of sports fields used for winter play. As a result of heavy use, I have received a number of inquiries about expected levels of play and use of winter games turf, as well as "rest" periods for fields. In response to those inquiries regarding field use and wear tolerance, I prepared a response based on my own experience working with sports turf and used information from the publication *Natural Turf for Sport and Amenity* by Bill Adams and Richard Gibbs. The contents of this book draw heavily on their experience in the U.K. and New Zealand and on studies carried out at the Sports Turf Research Institute in Bingley, Yorkshire. These studies have the advantage of being representative of the types of winter play conditions that confront managers in the Pacific Northwest.

The development of sand and amended sand base root zones has improved the playing quality of sports turf through increased drainage and compaction tolerance, increased retention of grass cover and better playing quality—at considerable capital and maintenance cost.

In discussing levels of winter play on sand-based turf, Adams and Gibbs note that winter usage of approximately eight hours per week and/or 125 games per season is the upper limit at which it is possible to maintain turf "when end of season

recovery requires overseeding or reseeding on less than 20% of the surface." They also suggest that the budget required to maintain grass cover at higher use intensities is wholly uneconomical. The costs of the high specification sand-dominated root zones was four to five times that for soil-based fields.



Winter usage of approximately eight hours per week and/or 125 games per season is the upper limit possible.

These use levels were also predicated on the assumption that the period from April to early September will be available to carry out the necessary renovations—overseeding, aeration/decompaction, weed control, topdressing, mowing, and irrigation—that are necessary to restore the fields to safe, playable conditions.

Even the best-constructed and managed sand-based turf will suffer from traffic damage when use exceeds these maximum levels, particularly if that use has occurred during the kind of exceptionally wet winter periods that we have experienced recently in the Vancouver region. The cool wet weather of March/April also impeded most efforts to address some of

these winter wear problems. There is no substitute for the time required to relieve compaction and re-establish a healthy turf cover. Some options do exist to improve wear tolerance for the winter play season, but these come at additional capital cost and would similarly require a rest period during which the fields were protected from play. All of the guidelines for good quality soccer pitch management incorporate a "close-season" period to facilitate renovation.

Overuse, in addition to providing poor field conditions, also creates significant increases in budgetary requirements to meet the additional maintenance costs. ♦

— *The Turf Line News*, Volume 153, August/September 1999

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Seasons Greetings from the staff and board of the Sports Turf Association. Have a safe and happy holiday and enjoy the New Year!



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