

Wet start to the cricket season

They say a picture tells a thousand words, and the recent media shots of Worcestershire's New Road home underwater and team photo's being taken on one of the few remaining green areas really sums up difficulties many grounds and their groundsmen and women are facing after a cold and very wet start to 2018.

After another 20mm of rain fell Monday evening it is looking highly unlikely we shall be seeing any cricket in the immediate future. For those of you lucky enough to work indoors I can tell you the rain started falling the day before Christmas Eve and has been incessant ever since with March being the second wettest in Sheffield since 1951 and we have already exceeded the monthly average for April. Most grounds are a long way from ready for the forthcoming season and unfortunately disruption is inevitable this year. So, my advice is simple, please be patient. The only thing that can be achieved by rushing onto wet grounds is damage to the playing surface.

At present most if not all grounds are saturated and at field capacity which means all the tiny spaces between the particles of soil are full of water. Some may use the analogy of the water table being full, which ever, we cannot start to prepare pitches until the soil starts to dry and these pore spaces start to empty, at this point the roller can start pushing these spaces together creating compaction. Early use of the heavy roller can cause ribbing, creases and root breaks, so use of the square mower or a light roller would be advisable when conditions allow, if your feet are leaving an impression in the square keep off altogether. Ideal rolling conditions are when the consistency of the soil resembles that of plasticine and timing is everything, two hours heavy rolling on a square under ideal conditions is better than 20 hours of rolling at the wrong time. The real hardness of pitches comes through the drying process, sun and wind are key to this as is the ability of the grass plant itself taking moisture from the soil through its roots.

Many outfielders are also saturated so mowing will have been sporadic if any has been done at all, this will mean when cutting is possible clippings will be a big problem. It is important to remove these at the earliest convenience to stop dead clippings killing grass and slowing ball roll on the outfield. If you do not have the option of grass collection on your mower then a working party with rakes is just as good. Take care with any aeration under these conditions, it may seem like a good idea but verti-draining a saturated outfield can cause capping of the surface and slitters and earthquake type linear aerators may cause weak areas allowing the outfield to open and crack when the summer eventually arrives.

Finally remember there's a reason that ours is a green and pleasant land, the weather has always and will continue to play a big part in outdoor sport. Delayed starts, rain breaks and washouts are all part of the game so be patient, you never know, the wet start may mean we get the driest season for years, we can live in hope.

Mark Pearson

Regional Pitch Advisor (Yorkshire)