



*"We can do your project or coach you through it"*

## Football / Soccer Field Guidelines

Football and soccer fields represent a unique situation in turfgrass management. No other turf area is expected to endure the amount of pressure that these fields must go through, especially in the high traffic areas. Thus, it is important to develop sound management practices for football and soccer fields, to produce a safe, healthy, and aesthetically pleasing playing surface. By following these guidelines, the wear and pressure to these fields can be somewhat minimized, resulting in a better playing surface which needs fewer repairs.

### The Turf Area

There are a couple of key steps you can take to minimize turf damage:

- 1) Use fields as little as possible when wet.
- 2) Rotate practice areas.
- 3) Allow turf to recover in spring before starting practice on it.

Adhering to the following maintenance guidelines will help ensure a healthy, safe, aesthetically pleasing playing field. (Refer to the Odeys ["Athletic Turf Maintenance Practices"](#) packet for a more complete description of these maintenance practices)

- **Mowing**

Athletic turf surfaces should be mowed as needed, not mowed by a set pattern of number of days. Grass will grow at different rates during different times of the year, and mowing frequency should be adjusted accordingly. There are a few guidelines to follow when mowing:

- 1) Never cut more than 1/3 of the grass blade in one cutting.
- 2) Always mow with sharp mower blades.
- 3) Alternate mowing patterns every time turf is mowed, unless a pattern is being maintained in the field.
- 4) Try to avoid mowing when soil is very wet to avoid compaction and tire rutting.

- **Over-seeding / Sodding**

Is crucial to maintain an aggressive over-seeding / sodding program to worn turf areas to help prevent these areas from being completely worn out. On football fields, it is crucial to maintain a consistent overseeding program throughout the playing season, especially in the area from 20-yard line to 20-yard line, between the hash marks.

The bench area on a football field also receives heavy pressure; maintain an overseeding program in this area also. On soccer fields, a heavy overseeding program should be maintained in the goalmouths, bench areas, and other high wear areas. Seed at a higher than normal rate since only a portion of the seedling plants will survive.

- **Fertility**

Certain nutrients are required to maintain a healthy, vigorous, and safe athletic turf surface. Nitrogen is the most important nutrient required by turf. It is recommended that for bluegrass and ryegrass fields receive 5 – 6 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet annually. 70% of nitrogen should be applied in the fall, with the late fall application being perhaps the most critical time to apply nitrogen. For increased vigor and wear tolerance, potassium can be applied at a 1:1 ratio with nitrogen.

- **Aeration and Topdressing**

Soil compaction is one of the most common causes of weak turf on athletic fields. *At minimum, athletic fields should be aerated twice a year*, once in late-spring and once in late-summer. Additional aeration during the playing season, especially in heavy wear areas, will be of additional benefit to a healthy turf area.

Topdressing following aerification can help improve the soil makeup as well as help level a playing surface.

- **Irrigation**

In general, athletic turf should be watered as needed, when the turf begins to show signs of stress. Deep, infrequent watering is preferred if the soil makeup of the field permits it. For closely mowed fields, or fields with poor drainage characteristics, more frequent shallower watering, may be required. Most athletic fields in this climate will require 1" to 1-1/2" of water per week. After practice or a game, especially under high heat conditions, a light watering will help reduce the stress to the turf.



### The Turf Area (cont.)

- **Weed / Insect / Disease Stresses**

Is important to continuously monitor stresses placed on the turf by these pests, and take corrective action as needed. A healthy, vigorous turf can help reduce or overcome damage from these stresses.

### General Field Guidelines

- **Communication**

Is crucial that the athletic staff, the grounds staff, and other users of the field communicate frequently.

The athletic staff and other users of the field should communicate field use schedules (games, events, practices, etc.) as early as possible to the grounds department. Should also keep the grounds department informed as to field conditions needing attention (too wet, too dry, wet spots, hazardous areas, maintenance issues, damaged equipment etc.) Is crucial these individuals partner with the grounds staff in maintaining a healthy, safe, and attractive field.

The grounds staff should communicate any changes in field conditions, areas that are under repair and need to be avoided, applications of fertilizers or pesticides that have been made, when the field is showing signs of overuse and needs a rest, changes necessary to the field use schedule, and general field conditions.

It is important that all parties associated with the fields use, (athletic directors, coaches, administrators, grounds personnel, band directors, and players), all work to the common goal of maintaining a safe, healthy, and aesthetically pleasing athletic playing surface.

- **Budgeting**

Since there tends to be less money in budgets these days, is crucial to use it wisely. It is important to make a list of priorities, determine needs, and how to best utilize the budget. Often the least expensive solution is not the one that provides long- term ongoing benefits, and can end up costing more in the long run.

- **Walk the Field**

This is the single most important step in a maintenance program when it comes to the safety of athletes. Because of this, it is essential to be aware of such hazards and minimize the risk of injury to players. Know your field, know when there are changes, and react to those changes immediately.

Walk the field before every practice or game looking for:

- 1) Sprinkler heads that have not retracted or need to be adjusted.
- 2) Burrows, large divots, or other holes in turf.
- 3) Damaged fencing.
- 4) After rain, mark any areas of standing water with flags, to repair when the field has dried.
- 5) Check bleachers and player benches for signs of damage.
- 6) Confirm that goals are secure and properly aligned.

Refer to Odeys [“Athletic Field Safety Checklist”](#) for a more complete listing. Keep an eye out for these hazards and help keep young athletes safe.

- **Practice Rotation**

Rotate practice areas on the field daily so traffic pressure and wear is dispersed across the field.

It is obviously easiest to go to the closest area of the field daily for practice, but is crucial that this pressure is dispersed over the entire field to reduce wear to any one area. Is much easier and less expensive to repair a stressed area than a completely worn out area of a field.

- **Equipment Removal**

Remove all practice equipment (temporary goals, sideline markers, blocking sleds, etc.) from the playing field area daily so as to not interfere with the irrigation system, to prevent damage to the playing surface from equipment sitting in one spot, and to help ensure practice equipment gets rotated around the field.

- **Waste**

Discard all trash into waste receptacles and ensure that adequate receptacles are available and emptied regularly.

- **Involvement**

A key to success is getting others involved in maintaining the field. Assign players certain responsibilities (moving practice equipment, picking up trash) that they must accomplish everyday. Give parents incentives to participate in the field’s maintenance. Be creative. The more people involved, the more work will get done to the field.

Remember, “The field you put to bed in the fall, is the field you will wake up to in the spring”.