



Top notch for operator health

Quality of cut has been paramount to operations at Watford FC with the Cub Cadet mower winning praise for its positive pitch performance.

While mowing appears simple in its application, it can have either positive or negative consequences for plant health depending on mower performance.

Attainment of correct cutting performance on sports pitches will include, but isn't limited to, sharpness of cut; attitude angle and behind centre distance (BCD) of the bedknife; frequency of clip and weight distribution. MTD Specialty Turf Products explores the importance of mowing on plant health and how quality of cut has been paramount to operations at Watford FC, seeing them crowned the Premier League Grounds Team of the Year for 2017/18.

Beginning with sharpness of cut - dull or poorly sharpened mowers tear

and shred grass blades rather than cut them cleanly, increasing the plants vulnerability to disease. A dull cut can be caused by a mower that does not maintain cut quality for an acceptable length of time.

This may be down to either a poorly designed bedknife-reel adjustment mechanism; an imbalanced reel causing premature wear; or a poorly designed cutting unit that "oscillates" during rotation.

Attitude angle and behind centre distance (BCD) are interlinked and an improper set-up of these features will not only impact on after-cut appearance but can negatively affect plant health. The greater the BCD, the more aggressive the cut because the grass blade will be "dragged" prior to

it being trapped between the bedknife and reel. An aggressive cut also means a shorter cut as the leaf blade is lifted "up and back" prior to shearing. For a less aggressive cut, the bedknife is positioned much closer to the reel.

Frequency of clip (FOC) is the distance between mower shear points, determined by the number of reel blades, rotational speed and the mowers forward speed. FOC is important in ensuring the correct quality is achieved for the specific height of cut. One should also consider the leaf's moisture content - a high clip rate on a less rigid leaf can cause mulching. The ability to alter FOC is thus advantageous.

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A short spell leads to a winning streak



Scott Tingley, head groundsman, at Vicarage Road Stadium Watford FC, has made an award-winning difference to his club's pitches in a short time at the club with a helping hand from Advanced Grass Solutions.

Scott has been head groundsman at Vicarage Road Stadium and its training ground since February 2016. Since then he has achieved fantastic results for Watford FC's pitches and met some early challenges head on, as he says: "My main challenges would have to be assembling a team of people from scratch whilst getting them to buy into my ways of working and philosophy."

Prior to Scott's current role with Watford, his background was football orientated, as he explains: "I began in football in 2004 at Chelsea FC, where I was a groundsman at Stamford Bridge working under Jason Griffin. Myself and Jason's assistant Kevin Fowler were responsible for the stadium pitch. In May, 2009, I joined Steve Braddock's team at Arsenal FC where I worked as a senior groundsman at the Training Centre where we not only maintained the pitches but gained valuable experience through completing our pitch renovations in-house."

A career in football grounds-keeping beckoned from an early age, as Scott adds: "My Dad was head groundsman at Wembley Stadium when I was growing up, so although I wanted to explore a career in graphic design, I was probably always going to follow in

his footsteps and work in groundsmanship!"

In only a short space of time, Scott and his team were rewarded for their groundkeeping success, with Scott and his team awarded the Premier League Grounds Team of the year this season. The award is based on the quality of the stadium pitch throughout the entire season. For Scott personally, it was a proud moment: "I had always looked at awards in our industry in a negative way, I believed that the pride of producing top quality surfaces was reward in itself and that I didn't need a trophy to be happy with my achievements. However, I feel that this particular award is justification of just how far we have come as a team and as a club in such a short period of time and is an award that I am extremely proud to have said we have won."

For Scott, a typical day is enjoyable because he is where he wants to be: "I wanted a head groundsman role for a long time and I'm now living that every day and I wouldn't change a thing."

Scott also thanks Advanced Grass Solutions (AGS) for their helping hand in creating an award-winning pitch, as he says: "AGS have helped massively. The quality of their service and

products have become something that as a young head groundsman I have been able to rely on. Having faith in the people around me and the service they provide enables me to focus on producing the best surfaces we can."

The bulk of Scott's knowledge and learning was developed while he worked under Steve Braddock and he has fostered a results-driven set of tips to maintain his healthy pitches: "I believe that clean, healthy, algae-free pitches are the main priority so I would promote being brave in regard to surface hygiene. Don't be scared to rake, scarify, verti-cut or aerate but know where to draw the line."

Since Scott joined Watford FC, he inherited a recently turfed stadium pitch halfway through the season and a training ground that needed immediate attention. Two years on and his best practice has paid off with the trophy to prove it, as he concludes: "I now have good pitches at the training ground and the need to purchase a trophy cabinet at the stadium so I'm over the moon with our progress as a team. Players have seen the difference my team has made and the stadium pitch is a big focus within the club and is something the club are extremely proud of."

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