



Count on it.

Skinned Area Maintenance

Connie Rudolph, CSFM, Head Groundskeeper
Midway Stadium – Home of the St. Paul Saints

Skinned area maintenance is one of the most important tasks for a Sports Turf Manager to make sure a field performs its best. There's a lot more to it than just "dragging". Water is the key to having your infield perform to the player's expectations. Through good maintenance practices, you can get and keep your infield in top-notch condition.

The use of water cannot be overstated. It is what gives the ball a true bounce and helps players get the traction they need. The best time to water is at night and make sure you water deeply (depending on the weather, of course). Water holding is related to depth, so the deeper the soaking, the less likely the field will dry out too quickly. You can add a row of heads for the skinned area to the irrigation system, or at least have a quick coupler available that you can attach a hose to. If time and personnel allow, a couple additional soakings throughout the day will keep the moisture intact.

Daily or weekly maintenance includes nail dragging, rolling, and mat dragging. Nail dragging only needs to be done once a week and its function is to loosen up the top half-inch or so of base material. Rolling helps pack down loose areas or low areas additional base mix has been added to. Daily dragging should be done slowly with care taken to stay 12" away from the edge. One should change up the dragging patterns and start on a high area and end up in a low area. In addition to the dragging and rolling, your field should be leveled (a 2" drop from infield grass to outfield grass) once a year and edged a couple times a year to eliminate lips.

Repair maintenance includes adding more material as needed in low spots and replacing material as it wears out around the bases. Low spots will naturally occur with dragging and occasionally, more material is needed after trying to push the displaced material back into the hole. You have to make sure to pack it in firmly, so it stays in place. The base area material can break down after a while and some will need replacing or a small amount of packing clay can be added for stability.

The incorporation of calcine clay into your mix will help resist compaction and help the water holding capacity. This can be done once a year as needed.

After a heavy rainfall, the best way to get rid of excess water is through the use of tennis court rollers. The absorbent ones work better than the non-absorbent ones for keeping your infield mix out of the grass. A calcine clay material can also be used for drying, but use the larger size, so it can be incorporated right back into your mix. Post rainfall is the best time to see where your low spots are.

Through proper maintenance techniques, you can make your field the best that it can be.