

TRACK DIARY

29 May 2023

The square is looking good with vigorous grass growth all over. The three central wickets effectively select themselves as the tracks for the three T20s against India in late August.

Head Groundsman in Malahide Phil Frost (PF) explains the need for separate wickets.

PF "Ideally, at the highest level a fresh playing strip is necessary for each match no matter how long the game is. When the time comes I may decide to only use two wickets, it depends on the conditions at the time."

9 June 2023

A glorious early June day amid a dry spell.

PF "I am doing very little to the international wickets except mostly feeding (every three weeks) with nitrogen fertiliser (Turf Tonic) which is a low dose feed that gives good colour to the grass.

In fact, at the moment the grass on the wickets is a little longer than normal. This allows me to identify more easily any damage caused by stud marks/slides during the course of club games. I can then repair as necessary. Sometimes some umpires will insist on cutting back the lush growth on a square before a club game.

I also scarify to remove thatch [dead plant material] which encourages grass growth.

And I roll the three strips with the roller at the back of the push mower which creates a neat striped effect. This method of rolling forces the roots to dig deeper and encourages and strengthens grass growth."



Centre tracks - 9 June

13 June 2023

After a busy weekend of club cricket there was a bit of wear and tear on the centre wickets. Inevitably a few slide marks but these were easily identifiable due to the longer grass covering.

There was also a very welcome early morning downpour of rain. We are in the middle of a hot spell and the ground and wickets dry up quickly. PF confirmed that the water tanks which are fed from drains on the ground are well stocked.

23 June 2023

In the last week or so PF has trimmed the three tracks. He identified four separate slide marks caused by studded fielders which he has gently spiked and seeded and which are well on the way to recovery.

This morning, PF has treated a couple of the wickets adjacent to the Indian wickets for mildew, brown spot and white spot fungal disease. He says there is no great problem if treated immediately. The disease particularly affects bare patches on used wickets. PF pointed out the diseased areas which look like white bird droppings. PF is confident the disease will not spread to the Indian wickets which are in a healthy condition.

BG "Do you need to prepare practice wickets?"

PF “The Indians and Irish will probably require three practice wickets each. One each before each game. So I have set aside six practice wickets on the square. Most of these have been used in club games already including three of the six which are hybrid wickets [hard wearing tracks which are a mix of fine turf and plastic fibre].”

30 June 2023

PF has two new welcome friends. Mallard ducks. PF reckons they first arrived in April when the weather was very bad, very wet and have stayed. Frank Donlon, PF’s long time ground assistant, thinks they are English ducks as they are afraid of Frank but have taken to Phil like a duck to water! This morning, bathed in sunshine, the birds lounged contentedly in front of PF’s container shed.



PF, Frank Donlon and mallards - 9 June

10 July 2023

A very wet Monday morning with downpours.

11 July 2023

PF “There is a problem on the outfield with rooks looking for leather jackets (larvae). Digging

big holes in the outfield. The rooks work their way through the entire outfield. Once one section has been covered they move onto a new section.

I am going to hand feed the entire outfield with a manual feeder and hopefully this will deter the rooks and deal with the problem.

Also, I will feed the Indian wickets with Turf Tonic because I cut the grass a little too short, so they need the nitrogen to give them a boost.”

1 August 2023

There has been record rainfall in Ireland in the month of July. PF says that all he has been doing is rolling the Indian wickets, when possible, to make them firm to protect against any slips and slides that occur during matches.

Meanwhile, the stadium build in Malahide is well under way. The last club game will be played on the main international ground on Bank Holiday Monday 7th August so PF will have a clear run for preparation before the first T20 on Friday 18th August.

PF “I am not overly worried by the terrible wet weather lately. The forecast here and in the UK is for this unsettled spell to finish around 10th August. And the ground and square here has good drainage.”

So even though PF is only expecting a let up in the weather shortly before the first game he is confident that the wickets are in good shape and that they will be dry and firm come the first match on the 18th August.



Centre wickets – 1 August



Waterlogged – 6 August

11 August 2023

A nice sunny, breezy morning.

PF is happy with the progress of the wickets despite the recent bad weather. For the first game on 18th August he intends to use the wicket on the right hand side of the three [identified by facing the square with your back to the clubhouse].

PF “I am little ahead of schedule with that wicket. You have to be because of the rain about.”

BG “What do you mean ahead of schedule?”

PF “Well, the wicket on the right has had more rolling because the other two were under the tarpaulin for a bit longer. So the wicket on the right is a little ahead of the other two and so it is a little firmer. But you never know, things may change coming up to the day and there may be a change of plan in terms of which wicket is used first.”

PF's wife Elaine is helping out with the rolling. She is an experienced steady hand on the motorised heavy roller.

The rook issue has been resolved and the outfield is coming back to normal.



PF and assistant – 11 August

18 August 2023 Friday

Game 1. Start time for all games = 3pm. Overcast conditions

Ireland 139/7 (20 overs)

India 47/2 (6.5 overs)

India win by 2 runs (DLS)

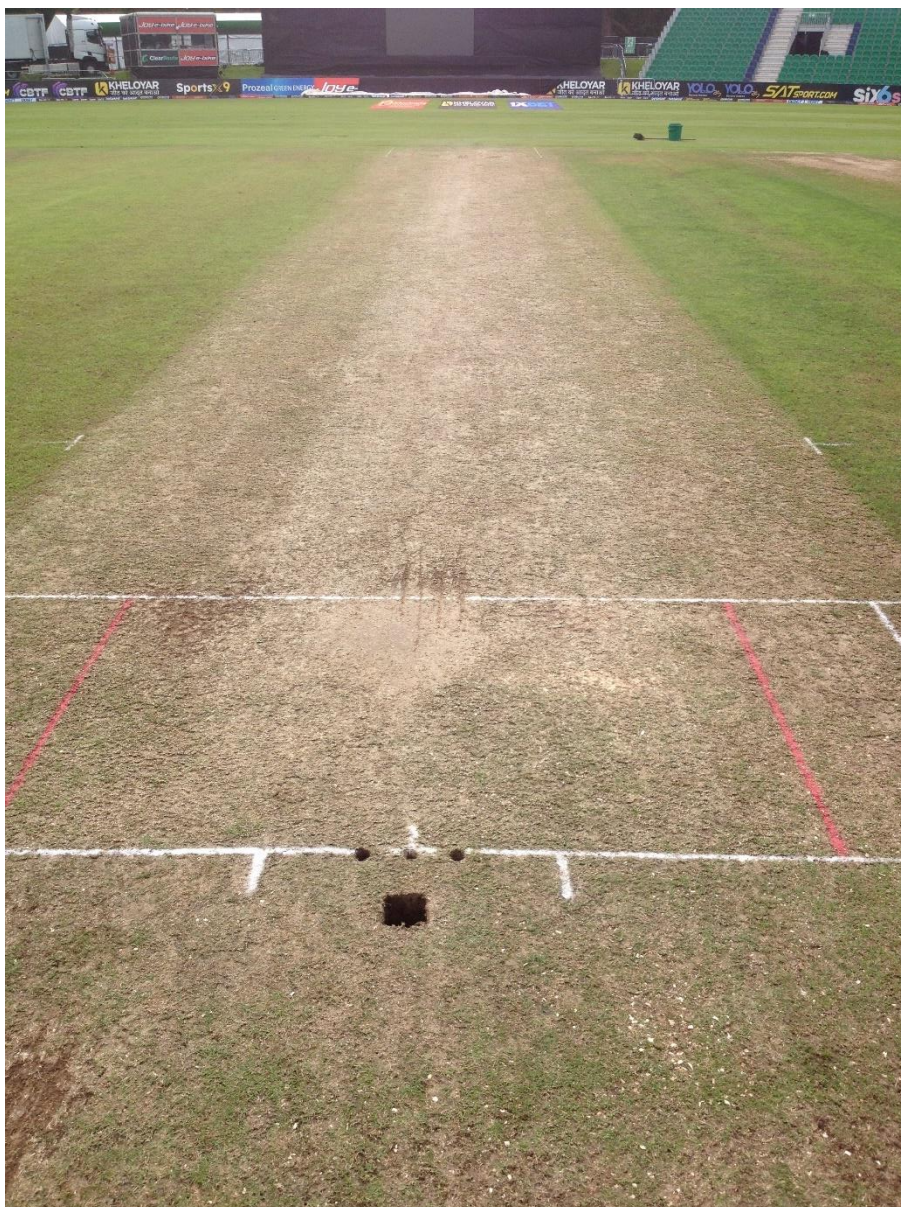
Rain stopped play. Later in the evening, monsoonal downpour.



Wicket before start of play - 18 August



Ireland v India – 18 August



Wicket - Saturday 19 August

20 August 2023 Sunday
Game 2. Played in sunshine.

India 185/5 (20 overs)
Ireland 152/8 (20 overs)
India win by 33 runs

23 August 2023 Wednesday
Game 3
Match abandoned. No play possible due to rain.

Before the scheduled start of Game 3 Irish all rounder Mark Adair approached PF

“Hi Frosty, listen I have a problem with colour blindness, is there any chance you could re-mark the red guidelines [re wides] on the crease?”

“No problem” replies PF.

As PF headed towards the wicket he was collared by the entire Irish squad who placed an Irish top hat on his head and serenaded his birthday amid much good natured banter. And no further mention of guidelines or colour blindness!



Match abandoned without play - 23 August

25 August Friday

BG “In the end which wickets did you use?”

PF “Actually I just used the one track for the two matches that were played [Friday and Sunday]. The wicket on the right hand side of the three. It played well on the first day and all parties were happy to use the same wicket again on the Sunday.”

BG “Were you happy how it played?”

PF “Yeah, all good. I mean the wickets were covered right up until the start of play for the first T20 due to the bad weather. So you would expect the ball to move around a bit off the pitch. I was happy how it played. Good bounce and carry and same again on Sunday.”

BG “Two more questions if I may. The weather in July and August right up to and during the T20s was very wet and challenging to say the least. And yet you always seemed confident that you

could produce good tracks. Why was that?"

PF " "Always have somewhere to go" was the mantra of Cecil Buttle, Head Groundsman at the County Ground in Taunton, Somerset for more than 30 years. He, and Dom Price who mentored me at Taunton taught me that you should always have a second option, another wicket to go to. So I was always comfortable that if wicket A was not playable I could revert to wicket B."

BG "Final question. Your old pals the mallard ducks. Are they still about?"

PF "Sadly no. When the stadium build began in early August I think they were frightened off and have not returned."



Pals

Brian Gilmore 2023