

PITCH INSPECTIONS

Advice to Match Officials & Guidance to Clubs

The SWL Management Committee strongly recommend that the best time for a referee to inspect a ground is not more than four hours prior to the kick off time. (There may be exceptional circumstances when an earlier inspection is required if teams or match officials are travelling a longer distance).

Clubs

Please do not leave it to the last minute to arrange an inspection, pre-warn your local referee an inspection may be needed. You can always cancel the inspection if weather conditions improve.

Clubs are reminded that any Level 5 Referee or Assistant Referee of the SWL match officials list can be used for the inspection, and your ground does not always have to be inspected by the same person.

If a pitch is deemed unfit for play please ensure the match official that carries out the inspection signs the necessary sheet that you submit to the League.

Referees

When you are called into inspect a ground to consider if a game can be called off to prevent travelling of teams and match officials, please before you go to the ground get a weather forecast check that covers the time up to and the duration of the game, so you are aware of what the weather may do before and during the match.

When inspecting the pitch please do it on your own. Do not allow the club representative accompany you because it may be possible that they may want to sway your decision to play or not. I would suggest the only person whose advice you may wish to consider is that of the groundsman, if there is one available, because he will know his pitch and how it is likely to drain.

A few questions a referee may like to consider when deciding on pitch fitness are:

- **SAFETY OF PLAYERS** - I make no apology for making it bold because it really is your number one consideration
- Will the pitch markings remain visible during play or adverse weather conditions; if not can they be renewed before kick off or at half time?
- Could play become farcical?
- Are weather conditions likely to improve or deteriorate?
- What will the pitch condition be like in the last half hour of the game – Will the pitch hold up for the duration of your game?

Now consider elements that are to be taken into account during wet weather

- Are there puddles on the pitch?
- If so will the ball run through the puddle?
- Is the ground under the puddle firm?
- Could the wet area benefit from forking or sand? (if a groundsman is available)
- Can players and match officials get a foothold on the surface?
- Is the surface “sticky” which means a foot could get stuck in the mud causing a twisted ankle or worse?

Now elements to consider for frosty pitches

- Is the pitch bumpy and does it have hard ruts in the ground or ice formed on any wet areas?

Consider:

- Are there any areas of the pitch that are harder than the rest, i.e. in the shade of buildings or stands that will not defrost the same as the rest of the pitch?
- If it is a light frost will it deteriorate later in the day?
- Can players and match officials have confidence that they can maintain a foothold?
- If a pitch is flat and well rolled, it can be considered safe to play on in the correct footwear, (either rubber moulded or multi stud boots)

With both rain and frost inspect the pitch as you would if you are playing the game, wear the correct footwear, not wellington boots, if possible take a football onto the pitch see how that behaves to assist you in making your decision.

If a referee does cancel a game then the home club concerned are required to submit a report form to the league that includes the match officials name and signature who carried out the inspection.

Fog can also cause problems because it can come or go in a matter of minutes, but as the referee you have to make the decision so therefore what questions do you need to ask yourself

- As referee can I see my assistants as required, I would suggest that you needed to see across $\frac{1}{2}$ of the width of the pitch
- Can players see far enough as not to effect the game, the best consideration of this is the goal keeper drop kicking the ball to around the half way line, can the outfield players see it coming ?

To finish, the SWL will reiterate the most important point, Safety of players and match officials is the main consideration,