

Quick turn-around and great results!

Great teamwork and bespoke maintenance programmes by Nottingham Forest FC's grounds team have kept the playing surfaces in top-notch condition

Unlike other clubs in the Championship, the playing surfaces at Nottingham Forest's City Ground and the training ground are not identical, so stadium head groundsman Ewan Hunter works closely with training ground head groundsman Matt Tietjen to ensure youth academy up to first-team players experience the best playing surfaces possible.

According to Ewan, the fibre-sand surfaces at both sites are in great condition, and that's due to the Rigby Taylor products they use.

"The players like the pitches at both venues as they give a slick playing surface," he says. "At the City Ground the surface doesn't bobble and the ball moves around well. My deputy, Jack Farmer, and I take a meter reading with a Clegg hammer if areas of the pitch are harder than others and occasionally struggle with water in the winter months. However, when the weather is on our side, we produce one of the best surfaces in the Championship." And a sizable collection of pitch, grounds team and groundsperson of the year awards from the Grounds Management Association and the STRI is testament to the whole team's high standards.

The equipment at the stadium includes G860 Dennis cylinder mowers, a Toro Procore, a vertidrain and sprayers. At the training ground, Matt uses ride on and tractor-mounted equipment – including sprayers, Toro Reelmaster 3100 mowers, a Toro Procore and a Rigby Taylor iGO line marker, marking pitches with the dilutable line marking paint, Dazzle.

Regarding pitch materials, Ewan says that Rigby Taylor's technical sales representative Mike Brear is an invaluable addition to the grounds team. "Matt and I speak to Mike quite a bit, he's always at the end of the phone when we need him. His product and industry knowledge is exceptional and we trust him 100%."

The club uses Rigby Taylor products that include the seed and its establishment, disease prevention, nutritional supplements and, according to Mike, his regular conversations with Ewan



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and Matt cover a proactive programme of treatment.

The annual nutrient and disease prevention programme at the City Ground includes Rigby Taylor's Microlite premium range of NPK-balanced fertilisers, which is complemented by the Nutri-Link range of bio-stimulant liquid sprays. In addition, Ewan uses the Autumn Green Bio fertiliser in autumn and winter and applies fungicides with fertiliser application throughout the year to keep diseases at bay.

Matt follows a similar programme to ensure playing surface consistency at both venues.

Ewan purchases products for both venues, in close consultation with Matt, and says that since joining the club in 2005, he tried a lot of grass seed brands before Rigby Taylor's R14 100% Perennial Ryegrass blend and continued with this for five years before upgrading to the R140 Tetraploid and Diploid Perennial Ryegrass blend because of its robust and hard-wearing benefits.

Faster establishment in a shorter renovation window was a key issue for the club this season, due to Covid-19 effects on the sporting calendar. Ewan

says he was literally waiting for the last kick of last season's home game so he could start work within a short six-week renovation window before the 2020/21 season kicked off. Matt too had the same time constraints when renovating his three academy pitches in time for pre-season training.

"One of the major benefits we've both found when using R140 is that it helps to establish germination quickly and offers early protection against fungi," Ewan says. "In the early days, when the seed bed is very young, we don't want to be going on there with a tractor or a sprayer so it gives us that extra couple of weeks' protection before we apply a fungicide. "R140 has already worked really well for us during renovation this year. Although we normally leave an eight- to nine-week window to create a quality playing surface, the grass has established well in just six to seven weeks, and we're confident that our on-going maintenance programme will support its durability so we can continue to meet the players' expectations throughout the season."

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