

Twenty-2.0 vision



One-day floodlit games have transformed cricket for the better, says Sussex CCC head groundsman Lawrence Gosling - equally at home up in the lights as on the square

MIKE BEARDALL reports

LAWRENCE GOSLING, head groundsman of Sussex County Cricket Ground, believes that 20-20 cricket has given the game a massive boost - and has brought new people into watching the game in all its forms.

"The idea behind 20-20 games is that they start when the average person's working day is over and are finished that evening," he says. "They are exciting and wonderful to watch."

Even though the pressures to produce different pitches is on the ground-

staff the results are fantastic to see under the floodlights at the Hove ground, next to the sea and just along from Brighton.

Sussex County Cricket Club was the first first-class county formed in 1839 and the current ground in Eaton Road has been there since 1871.

Lawrence has been with Sussex, apart from a brief spell with Horsham, since 1994 - when he was in building maintenance under the direction of the late great head groundsman Peter Eaton who died in February 2000.

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“The pitches have to be flat and true and hard for batsmen to hit plenty of sixes in a short space of time”

Lawrence Gosling, Head Groundsman, Sussex CCC

He remembers the first time Peter let him cut a pitch in 1996. “It was a nerve-racking experience but it was then I decided to be a full-time groundsman,” says Lawrence, who then went on to do an NVQ Level Two in sportsturf management between 97 and 99 at Brinsbury College under IOG lecturer Ian Norman.

Since then he has achieved an HNC in sportsturf science and management at Merrist Wood, taking two years. “The

emphasis with a lot of these courses is on golf,” says Lawrence. “The specific needs of cricket are very different - in golf you are constantly trying to open up the rootzone. In cricket we are rolling and compacting and still expecting grass to survive.”

Before Crawley-born Lawrence went into cricket he was with BT for 15 years before taking voluntary redundancy and getting the Sussex maintenance job.

Derek Traill arrived from

Aberdeen in 2000 as head groundsman, a position he held until September 2005 when he decided to go back into the oil industry and move to Houston, Texas.

Between 2004 and 2005 Lawrence went to Horsham Cricket Club as head groundsman returning to the county ground in March of that year.

The Sussex ground is mostly chalk and flint with three inches of clean topsoil on the top. The square is now back to Surrey Loam, having previously been Ongar Loam after Surrey Loam.

The grass mixture is R9 from Rigby Taylor - four ryegrass cultivars: Greenflash, Greenway, Tucson and Ace.

ON the day I visited there was a break in the clouds after heavy rain the night before and Lawrence was tracking storms on his laptop through the MetOffice.

He and his team of four, including deputy Andy Mackay who came from Blackpool CC and St. Annes CC in Lancashire in 2006, were preparing the ground for the first big game of the season - a four-day match against Kent, with crowds of about 1,500 expected for the first few days.

Four days before a three-day second eleven match had taken place. The club was packed with activity, cricket coaching was taking place, the nets were out on the field.

Lawrence was having a coffee when the chief executive popped his head in with a ‘need to see you urgently.’ It turned out to be a brief discussion about the impending game with Kent.

The previous day, Sunday, Lawrence and Andy had been at St. Albans School for a meeting of about a dozen ECB pitch advisers (of which

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The view of Sussex CCC's ground from the south

they are two) with Chris Wood, the ECB pitches consultant, and Martin Ford, the ECB fine turf project manager who took on the role after relinquishing his post as treasurer of the IOG - gaining an MSc in Sportsturf Science from Cranfield University along the way.

Martin has been developing techniques for accurately laying down Performance Quality Standards in cricket and was talking to the advisors about the techniques he employs - including a sophisticated Excel spreadsheet method that can be adapted for each ground.

Lawrence is leading a campaign to get more groundsmen into the Sussex Association of Cricket Groundsmen. Of the 250 clubs in Sussex there are about 120 groundsmen. Only 42 have joined in the first year, despite the obvious benefits.

"One is that the IOG training course costs are only half for members and the other half can be met out of Sussex Cricket Board funds," says Lawrence. "It's important to have a thriving association - after all the Umpires Association expects everyone to belong."

As part of his role as an ECB pitch advisor Lawrence visits around 30 clubs, looking at core samples and giving groundsmen, who are sometimes volunteers in small villages, the benefit of his years at Sussex.

FLOODLIGHTS have transformed cricket at Hove. They were one of the first clubs to get permission. Although the lights have to be out by eleven it has given 20-20 matches, the pro-40s and the pro-50s a massive injection of life.

Other grounds that now have floodlights include Essex, Hampshire, Glamorgan

and Derby.

"The pitches have to be flat and true and hard for batsmen to hit plenty of sixes in a short space of time," says Lawrence.

"The great thing about these evening games is the *razmatazz* that goes with them. Quite often there will be helicopters dropping people off and exciting events around the ground. The entertainment aspect is what has made these games so popular with people who can come and see them after work."

As well as the five groundstaff there are an extra two who look after the Preston Nomads Ground at nearby Fulking (under an arrangement by an ex-president) and another looks after the Academy ground at Blackstone.

Lawrence (50) lives on the site, in a house next to the Cricketers pub outside the county ground gates. He and

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LAWRENCE GOSLING

- Age 50.
- Born in Crawley, Sussex.
- 1979 Worked for BT
- 1994 Took voluntary redundancy.
- Same year joined Sussex CCC in buildings maintenance



- '97-'99 NVQ 2 at Brinsbury
- 2000 Became groundsman
- 2001 Deputy head groundsman
- 2004-05 Head groundsman at Horsham Cricket Club.
- 2005 Head groundsman Sussex CCC
- Also holds HNC in sportsturf science and management from Merrist Wood.
- Believes all groundsmen should belong to an organisation to share ideas and benefit from training packages.

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A nets session in action for Sussex's players in front of the Grandstand - the oldest parts of the ground date back 100 years



his partner Sharon have two daughters, Maisy (five) and Cadie (three). He also has two grown-up children, Aaron (26) and Elli (24).

"It helps living here because I can check on the site during the night and have a late-night walk round to check gates and that sort of thing," says Lawrence.

Altogether around 55 days of cricket is played at Hove, including 12 days of the second eleven matches and two or three games by the Ladies teams, the Presidents and the Academy.

With eleven pitches under preparation or being used there is always work to be done. Re-seeding, topdressing and adding new loam, ensuring the mix is right for the roots.

Lawrence is keen to ensure that all his staff have up-to-date training, even the youngest at 19 has just completed his NVQ Two.

The pressures are obvious and Lawrence is no stranger

to long days working from 7.30am to eleven at night on the day of a 20-20, pro-40 or pro-50.

Between 4,800 and 7,500 spectators is not uncommon for the one-day events.

June is the busiest month with five 20-20s, then there's the possibility of a quarter final and then the finals at the Rosebowl.

"We have staff rotas to ease the strain but the pressure is often on and we are used to coping with that," says Lawrence.

Staff have the added pressure of televised games: one day in May (a 50-over against Surrey), a four-day match in June, and a pro-40s game in August. Other TV coverage could happen depending on results.

ONE of Lawrence's lesser-known roles is being a steeplejack - scaling the massive floodlights to change bulbs. Last year a fire was caused by a short-circuit and

it looked "pretty impressive" from the ground, according to Lawrence.

What it looked like up the top he didn't say - but he did show me the pictures of the melted wiring. "Luckily I have no fear of heights," says Lawrence.

Pop concerts present their own problems. The Elton John concert two years ago attracted a massive audience that filled the ground and the McFly one last year a smaller, but no less significant one. Surrounding blocks of flats let their balconies for a grandstand view of the events, like the Elton John concert which drew a crowd of 18,500.

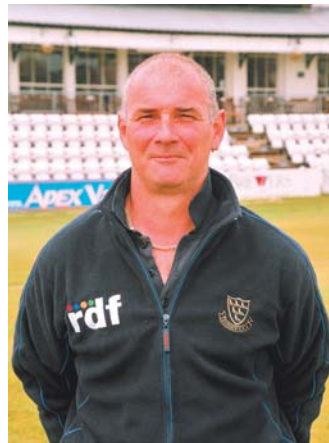
"The weight of the stage alone for Elton John was 250 tonnes with concrete blocks to hold it in place that would give most groundsmen nightmares - but we got everything back to normal in a reasonable amount of time, although concerts usually mean dead grass and a re-seeding job," says Lawrence.

The worst problem he has seen has been the aluminium trackways for heavy vehicles shifting from side to side taking all the grass out underneath. Lawrence's regime to combat the worst is to apply a light feed before construction work to relieve grass stress. "We sometimes get away with it, otherwise we have to reseed with R9 and usually have germination within a week and establishment within two to three weeks," says Lawrence.

This year Lawrence is investing in Climate Covers from TTS which allow the air to circulate underneath to prevent disease forming.

Equipment on the ground includes a Groundsman Spiker (which penetrates five and half inches with solid

"The game of cricket has never looked healthier"



These Hove flats at the north-end of the ground get a full view of matches and concerts - some let their balconies to spectators for big events

tines. In the winter it is often fitted with hollow tines). There's also a John Deere Gator and a John Deere triple ride-on plus three wicket mowers, two Alletts and a Lloyds Paladin. The tractor is a John Deere 43/10.

A 36-inch Allett hydraulic is used for striping the square. There is also a Sisis brush unit and two Blotters, one large and one mini from CMS, for water removal, plus two ride-on rollers.



Lawrence is looking forward to this season. "Of course it is going to be a challenge, but that is what this game is all about - and the game of cricket has never looked healthier," he says.

Sussex County Cricket Club

SUSSEX CCC, formed in 1839, has used four cricket grounds in Brighton and Hove.

Matches were first played on a ground donated by the then Prince Of Wales and the ground was called 'The Prince of Wales Ground' (where Park Crescent now lies), then Temple Fields (where Montpelier Crescent now lies), and the Royal Brunswick Ground (where Third and Fourth Avenues are situated).

In 1871 the ground in Eaton Road was acquired from the Trustees of the Stanford Estate. Turf from the Royal Brunswick Grounds was transferred and re-laid on the square.

The first county match was played at Eaton Road on June 6 1872 against Gloucestershire. As well as the County Ground, Hove, the Club's First and Second XI regularly play

around the County, the grounds at Horsham, Eastbourne and Arundel Castle playing host to First XI fixtures.

The Club won its first County Championship in 2003.



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