



By Michelle Gebrian



Grievances of Grass

Wimbledon's manicured lawns are not without their health hazards. In fact, grass can be one of the most injury-invoking surfaces of all.

When a player changes from a claycourt surface one week to a grasscourt the next, the body is challenged in many ways. Grasscourt demands on the body are some of the toughest of the year on the professional circuit, and players often have difficulty adjusting to this three-four week period when they are competing on grass.

Not Just a Walk in the Park

Grasscourts are recognized as being extremely fast-paced and the balls bounce much lower from the ground than on alternative court surfaces. Points are typically much shorter due to the increased frequency of serve and volleying on grasscourts. As the grasscourt becomes worn with frequent play, dirt patches may be exposed on some areas of the court, which can create inconsistencies. Also unique to grasscourts is the effect of early morning condensation, or dew, which can have a significant influence on when the courts are deemed playable and safe.

The Grass Is Not Always Greener...

At first glance, grasscourts may appear to be the most forgiving courts. But in reality this is far from the truth. The lower ball bounces demand the player assume a position closer to the ground so they may successfully get to the ball. This means increased bending through the knees, hips and lower back, which can lead to unique injuries observed with grasscourt play.

Typically, patellofemoral (knee) joint injuries are frequent on grasscourts, as well as low back disorders due to repeated forward bending. Extensive muscle soreness throughout the legs (hamstrings, quadriceps and gluteal muscles) is also common.

When grasscourts become slippery due to patches of dirt or condensation, there is risk for sliding injuries which are usually observed with claycourts. These include groin or hip muscle strains and pelvic dysfunctions sustained from falling. Achilles (ankle) injuries can occur when the foot slides from dirt to grass, often causing the foot to become stuck when the surface varies.



Amelie Mauresmo knows the perils of grasscourts all too well.

Also, wrist injuries such as ligament sprains and tendonitis are common with grasscourt play, due to increased frequency of volleying.

Put the Ball in Your Court

If you're wise about preparation and recovery techniques, you can conquer the grasscourts like any Wimbledon champion. Key steps you can take to decrease the likelihood of injuries include:

- **Stretching on regular basis:** Quadriceps, hip flexors, hamstrings, gluteals, low back, calves and hip rotator muscles.
- **Regular massage or myotherapy treatments:** Pay specific attention to your low back and leg muscles.
- **Wearing grasscourt shoes:** Specific shoes are designed with a dimpled surface on the bottom, which helps improve your traction when playing on grass. Improved traction leads to increased security and less likelihood of slipping.
- **Specific strengthening exercises for grasscourt play:** Concentrate on strengthening your knees, especially your quadriceps and gluteal muscles. Focus on performing pain-free squats and lunges to help you get low on the court. If you have a history of knee or low back injuries, visit a physiotherapist to learn specific exercises so you can be healthy and successful on the court.
- **Hydrotherapy:** To recover from the aches and pains associated with grasscourts; try a spa bath with jets, a gentle swim in cool water or try alternating hot and cold showers to help your muscles return to normal.
- **Epsom salt baths:** Frequently used by the professionals on the tennis tour, these can be very effective in easing muscle soreness after a long match on grasscourts.

By putting these tips into practice, you'll be following in the footsteps of many great Wimbledon champions who know the secrets of how to get the advantage. You don't have to travel to the All England Club to master grasscourts! ●