

# ASSOCIATION DES CLUBS DE CRICKET DU SUD-OUEST

*Siège social : Hôtel des Associations - 47160 DAMAZAN*

## ACCSO Policy on Pitch Standards and Player Safety

**Proposal approved by ACCSO Committee on 6 January 2024**

**Approved by member-clubs by electronic vote at EGM on 10 February 2024.**

### 1. Preamble

The time has long gone (if it ever existed) that cricket in the ACCSO clubs was a vehicle for well-to-do retired/near-retired English expatriates to prolong their playing careers.

Today's ACCSO cricket is played for the most part by a young population of relatively modest means. The disposable income which they can put into their cricket is very limited.

Despite generous sponsorship from Siddalls/Blevins Franks and despite every effort by ACCSO management to control the cost of competitive cricket (admin costs, competition entry fees, balls), all other charges – with the single exception of licence fees – continue to rise (travel, club kit, ground maintenance).

Against this backdrop, the one single cost element which cannot be compromised is that of player safety. And central to player safety is the nature and condition of the pitch itself – the subject of this policy paper.

### 2. Player safety is also about....

- **What the MCC Laws require:** ACCSO competition regulations are explicitly based on the Laws - umpires' authority concerning playing conditions in general, limitations on bouncers/beamers, etc.

- **ECB Guidelines on restrictions concerning junior players** (helmets, bowling/fielding limits): These are incorporated into the ACCSO regulations.

- **French sporting regulations on age limits/parental consent:** These also figure in ACCSO competition regulations.

- **Common-sense:** Proper preparation of the outfield (regular mowing and, ideally, rolling).

**Without in any way minimising the importance of these core elements, the condition of the pitch is critically important to player (batsmen, bowlers) safety.**

## **Bowlers:**

### **- Run-up:**

**There should be zero/minimal raised edge at the end of the carpet.** To ensure that the bowler has minimum risk of tripping up as he moves from the outfield grass onto the playing surface.

This is best done by permanently screwing/nailing down the 4 edges of the playing surface.

As necessary, the ground all around the carpet should be re-landscaped and grassed up to the level of the carpet-edge.

A mobile/portable pitch which is brought out and laid down for each match is clearly incompatible with these requirements.

**The length of the playing surface is important.** All bowlers – especially those with long run-ups - must be given the chance to adjust to the change from the outfield grass before their delivery stride.

To achieve this objective, a carpet of 30m in length is the minimum requirement. This length is not available from certain manufacturers.

### **- Front foot and follow-through:**

No bowler should be put at risk when his front foot lands at the end of his delivery stride.

That front foot should not slide uncontrollably on the playing surface.

If this happens because the playing surface – whether natural or artificial - is wet/slippery, there is a clear case for the umpires to satisfy themselves that the playing conditions are suitable for play to continue.

In the case of a carpet, if the front foot slips because the carpet moves under-foot, this is clearly abnormal and is the sign that the carpet is not suitably anchored.

Equally, if the carpet moves or becomes uneven during the bowler's follow-through, this is another clear sign of the carpet not being suitably anchored.

A mobile/portable pitch which is brought out and laid down for each match is highly unlikely to be suitably anchored.

## **3. Batters:**

No batter should be put at risk by a carpet being inadequately anchored.

**- Foothold:** Everything of the above piece on bowlers – apart from the front foot-fall – applies equally to batters, especially those on strike.

Furthermore, batters should not be put at risk of turning their ankles (or worse) when running between the wickets.

The playing surface should be anchored along its full length and any edge eliminated/minimised by earthworks.

Batters grounding their bat in order to avoid a run-out should not be faced with having the bat come up against any unevenness/breakdown in the artificial playing surface.

This risk is highly improbable in the case of woven or tufted carpets. But other technologies (notably honeycomb-type) are inherently less stable, aggravated in the case of such a carpet being brought out and laid down for each match.

#### **- Reducing risk of injury from uneven bounce:**

All playing surfaces – natural or artificial – can produce a bounce that endangers the striker, even at the highest level. It is essential that, at the ACCSO competitive level, such risks are minimised. All the precautions enshrined in the Laws, ACCSO regulations and umpire training are nullified if the playing surface is unsuitable in itself or badly laid.

There is only the one means of achieving a suitable playing surface: By laying down a permanent woven/tufted carpet, with its corresponding underlay/shock absorber, both firmly anchored on to a prepared base. This base will be either compacted limestone (*calcaire*); or, as is often the choice of municipalities if they take charge of the installation, a concrete base.

“Firmly anchored” means the underlay and the carpet are nailed down (on *calcaire*) or screwed down (concrete) along all 4 edges.

And why not glued down? Because if, subsequently, the tension needs to be adjusted (either laterally or longitudinally), this is not possible if the underlay and carpet are glued down. The same logic applies if, over time, the base needs any re-work.

The importance of an underlay/shock absorber cannot be over-estimated. It is this which provides the foundation for best assuring an even bounce. This is not to say that all deliveries should be predictable: it should be the talent of the bowler which produces the unpredictable, not the playing surface.

Any other artificial surface is very much inferior in providing for coherent bounce, a fact aggravated if such a surface is brought out and laid down ahead of matches.

#### **4. Other factors:**

##### **- Return creases:**

The Laws (Appendix C) require that the Return Creases should be clearly marked, at 1,32m from middle stump. Most manufacturers provide for this with a standard width of 2,74m.

Any carpet wider than this provides a bigger margin between the return crease markings and the edge of the carpet, for the better safety of the bowlers with regard to their footfall.

##### **- Wide deliveries:**

ACCSO competition regulations comply with ICC Playing Conditions on pitch markings for Wide deliveries (89cm from middle stump). The offerings from certain manufactures are not wide enough for this – let alone for the painting of Return creases (see previous item).

## 5. Conclusions:

It is an incontrovertible fact that only woven/tufted carpets, with suitable underlay/shock absorber – laid down once but retaining the possibility of adjusting the tension as the case arises – are suitable for adult male competitive cricket, played by a predominantly young and very athletic community.

The financial costs of providing such a correct and stable playing surface are unfortunately quite significant, especially given the state of finances of most clubs.

A club faced with such an outlay could try to emulate the most recent installation (2020) in the region – where the *mairie* paid for the carpet and shock absorber and carried out the construction of the (concrete) base and the installation. Any affiliated club not in such a happy situation should without fail petition its parent *association omnisports* for financial assistance. And then make use of club manpower to prepare a *calcaire* base and do the installation themselves.

Full documentation on the installation of a woven/tufted carpet and underlay, on a *calcaire* base, is available from ACCSO.

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