Cricket Nets (Stage 1)

Contributed by David Soede
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Some time ago I set out to build cricket nets in my backyard. I live on acreage so have the room - well, could make the room removing some old stone fruit trees (you can always buy apricots, plums, nectarines and apples can't you!) - and there were a bunch of good reasons:

* My place is really central to our The Lakes church and cricket team (many of whom play in the Tungstens) so it would reduce drive time signficantly when we all wanted to get together and practice.
* The nets we currently use are often booked out and the club gets preference. Plus when it rains they stay really wet for a couple of days as the idiots that laid them made them dead flat (no fall). No lights either . . .
* My son Zac needs the practice or he could grow up to bat like me . . . although he is only 19 months it's never too early!
* I can practice as often as I want whenever I have spare time

Well there have been setbacks but today I really reached the point of no return, so here's the progress so far . . .

Stage 1 - clear the canvas
Here are the old stone fruit trees and anti-bird netting

So I borrowed my neighbours excavator and knocked the nets and trees down

A quick slash with the tractor & slasher and we had a blank canvas

Stage 2 - prepare the pitch base
Rotary Hoes cut up the grass and get to compacted soil (in my case, clay)

I could just scrape the top off with a shovel if I wanted but that was too hard

My mate Richard Clark came over in his 4 ton bobcat and ripped into it and cleared a 1.8m wide strip with winged ends in no time

Rich did a sterling job but the weight of his bobcat and moisture in the soil meant he couldn't finish the gradient perfectly (100 fall in the first half, 250 in the second, I wanted 200 over the whole length) and as he was busy advised me to get an excavator in a couple of days to drag the bucket down and finish it perfectly, so no worries, my neighbour was about to build a pool, I figured a few beers could see 10 minutes of work done on my pitch, and that's when things went horribly wrong . . .

He started 200mm down at the top (creek) end and I went off to get him some beers. I came back and disaster!

He was 600mm down at the bottom end (road end) and I've never seen a pitch so far below grass level before . . .

So then I had to pay another bobcat operator (as my mate Richard Clark was too busy) to fill it back in and level it! I got a good operator who lived in the street - Richard Joplin - he had a smaller 2 ton bobcat and could do an excellent levelling job.

He got the gradient perfect :) You can just make out my stringline which I ran for a 1-in-100 fall (I used the old water hose trick to get levels at both ends then dropped the bottom end 200mm)

This looks familiar - a strip of dirt similar to BEFORE the pool excavator got involved!

Stage 3 - Forming Up
Next step was to form up and pour road base in to provide a better base for the concrete slab. It's a bit of overkill, but the clay is a bit reactive so it will mean the slab stays in better condition over time. Still, with 82 reo and 100mm thick concrete at 20mpa I don't think it's breaking up in a hurry (this is what house slabs are made from - engineering overkill)

Tungsten Aaron Skelley is the concretor in charge and Tungsten Sir Chris Hogbin couldn't be kept away either - here he is checking his tungstens are in place :)

Looks like Chris's pull shots and mid-wicket tonks come in handy for building his roadbase levelling muscles - we put 12 ton of road base down!

I dug 300mm diameter and 700mm deep piers in the four corners to allow for a long PVC sleeve to be conreted in situ. These will be for removable net posts later on.

Next step was to compact down the roadbase after mixing in a few bags of cement and watering it in. This "stabilises" the road base (almost like laying a slab on which to lay a slab) and provides an excellent base for the steel re-inforcement (reo) to come. I did the wacka-packing (note those rippling muscles queueing up to be given a go!) whilst the rest of the boys . . .

took a break and watched :)

Then we cut up the steel sheets and lay them on chairs and tie the steel together, and it's all ready for tomorrow's pour!

Genki was so keen to bowl . . . he's getting a lot better (bear in mind it's difficult on the grid - he's working on getting 2 fingers on the seam / ball only and not falling away in delivery stride)

Stage 4 - Concrete Pour
First we cutout some reo and placed some bricks for where the stumps will go

Then the truck arrived and the first pour of the hallowed pitch commenced:

I carefully plumbed up the PVC sleeves embedded in the concrete (where the posts will go)

A couple of boys levelled it around with shovels whilst one screed:

After screeding the concrete is floated and edged (usually floated 2, sometimes 3 times - it draws moisture to the surface, increases smoothness and kicks off the curing process more rapidly)

In our case due to the area of the pitch and the heat (curing the concrete rapidly) we used a whirlybird for the second float:

The float was then finished by hand in full width sweeping strokes for a perfectly smooth finish:

Done!

Which meant beer oclock!

After the boys had left I tidied up and hosed down the slab (slows the curing process for maximum strength)

Just one thing left to do . . . inscribe and dedicate the pitch :)

Stage 5 - Strip formwork and concrete cure (2-4 weeks)
Here's the latest - formwork removed and constant watering during the really hot weather we're having at the moment to keep it cool. By cooling concrete after the initial set - using shade, water / evaporation and (best method) heshian or similar material wet down regularly - you slow down the curing or ongoing hardening process. Concrete has a crystalline structure so the slower it hardens the larger the crystals and the greater the strength (and less likelihood of cracking over time). Most of the pitch has a good 1-in-100 fall from left to right (looking at it from bowlers end, or from off to on side for RH batsman) which will dry the corridor for the typical RH bowler over to a RH bat first. Unfortunately the bowlers wings dont have the same consistency in fall - you can see the water running away from the right wing first which isn't ideal in terms of maximising pitch usability after rain. Still, it's pretty good, and LH and round-the-wicket bowlers (eg Hogbin) will benefit :)

Pitch needs a couple of weeks of curing before synthetic turf should be laid , so in the meantime I'll get onto the actual nets.