

This job has its ups and downs

By **ANDREW CHATFIELD**

THE sloping pitch at Loakes Park was often a focus for wry comment. The bumpy pitch at Adams Park has been the subject of stronger language.

Rod Lavers' defence is best summed up in the phrase: Don't shoot me, I'm only the groundsman.

The end of Wanderers' season on Saturday was also the end of a career for Rod, who has been club groundsman for nine years, tending both the slope and the bumps.

No-one appears to be blaming him for the state of the pitch, which is now affectionately known as The Beach because of all the sand used to improve it.

The young pitch has been over-used, not least because the club has no separate training pitch.

"The club as a club has not given me any stick," said Rod, 35, who lives in Conigre, Chinnor, with wife Sue.

"They felt disappointed for me that things haven't gone so well. Maybe, with what has happened this year, we have made people aware that they should take a different view as regards training and the extra games that are played on it.

"I think we had problems from day one because of the short summer period last year. The last game was on May 22 and we started on July 24."

But he adds the pitch seems to have affected opponents more than the Blues.

"We haven't dropped a point here in the league since we drew with Cheltenham on November 30. But obviously I feel very sorry for the boys. I think they have done superbly well to manage the way they have done."

The incoming groundsman, 42-year-old Jim Gardner, will have 13 weeks over the summer to get things right this year, provided the sun shines.

He revealed his strategy to the Free Press. "What we are planning to do in the next fortnight is to fill in the holes, level it all out, deep spike it to give the



Down on the beach: Rod Lavers hands over the pitch battle to Jim Gardner on Saturday

grass a chance to grow and double the amount of seeding to help the roots bind the sand and soil together."

Jim, due to move into a club flat overlooking Adams Park, formerly worked as a groundsman employed by the John Lewis Partnership at Winter Hill Golf Club and the Odney Club, both in Cookham.

He has been Wycombe fan for 30 years. He shares Rod's view of the reasons for the state of the pitch.