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Thursday, Aug. 7, 1975 Philadelphia Inquirer

Area Golf Courses Taking a Beating From the Weather

by Fred Byrod
 Inquirer Sports Editor

Maybe you've forgotten all that rain last month or the most recent heat wave, but the men who take care of golf courses in the Philadelphia district have not.

They'll be working for months to repair the damage. In some cases, they say, the courses will not recover this season from turf disease caused by the weather.

"I can't remember anything like this in my 25 years at Merion," Richie Valentine, president of the Philadelphia Association of Golf Course Superintendents said yesterday. "We're in trouble, some more than others, but we all have big problems.

"Those flooding rains last month washed out bridges, eroded bunkers, and in general caused a lot of cleanup work. I've heard of at least a dozen places where lightning split trees or did other damage, although fortunately no humans were hit.

"After the rains came that intense heat and humidity. Grass roots this year were shallower than ever and

the grasses—particularly fairways—simply couldn't take it. Driving around last week, I could see a lot of fairways 'going' on ours and other courses," Valentine said.

Courses with low-lying holes suffered the most from excessive rain. Whitemarsh Valley, where the IVB Classic in June had to be postponed twice because of flooding, was hit even harder by last month's downpours. "One day, we were out in a rowboat inspecting damage," superintendent Joe Felus said.

In one 66-hour stretch, Pine Valley's rain gauge registered 11 inches. "We had to use bulldozers and a front end loader to get the sand back in proper place in bunkers," superintendent E.R. (Eb) Steininger said. "We couldn't mow fairways for six days, and when we did, some of them 'cooked out.'

Al Radko, Eastern director for the Green Section of the United States Golf Association, agreed with Valentine in calling "adverse turf conditions here the most prolonged in my memory.

"It started in April when severe cold and wind blocked turf growth," Radko said. "Then in May we had summer-like weather and there was a heavy surge in growth, particularly in poa annua which is the hardest to maintain in the heat of July and August.

"Water management is one of the keys to good turf," Radko said, "and with all the flooding in June and July, control was lost in many cases. That left the courses at the mercy of other conditions, particularly heat and humidity."

"We fight turf disease with fungicides, pesticides, and herbicides," Valentine said. "One of our most prevalent diseases is Pythium, which strikes all grasses. Usually, the fungicide for it is sprayed on. One fairway application for a hole of 400 yards costs \$90 to \$100. A heavy rain can wash most of it away and you have to do it all over again.

"These chemicals have soared in price. The average 18-hole course budgets from \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year for them. This summer, chemical bills are to jump as much as 25 percent.

"One sad phase of this is that often the supers are blamed for conditions simply beyond their control. I know of three — all competent — whose jobs are shaky right now because their courses have gone bad in the last month.

"I've seen many fairways the last few days that are simply beyond recovery," Valentine said. "Crabgrass is running everywhere because the pre-emergence herbicides used to control it were washed away. We're not going to get any real relief until we have a series of cool nights."

Life is what happened to you while you were making other plans.
