



So Far, So Good

By Paul Jacobs, agronomist, Northeast Region | August 4, 2017



Plentiful rain has caused naturalized rough areas to be dense. Mowing will improve playability, but will also impact aesthetics by removing seedheads.

At USGA headquarters in Far Hills, New Jersey, there have been as many days with rain as without since mid-July. Much of the Northeast has experienced similar conditions. This type of weather often causes soft and slow playing conditions, especially when it comes with high heat and humidity. The recent stretch of hot and wet weather led many facilities to implement defensive management practices such as mowing or rolling less frequently than normal. Although recent cooler temperatures were refreshing and alleviated turfgrass stress, now is not the time to let your guard down as we head into August.

June and July are in the rearview mirror and most facilities have had a good season in regards to playing conditions. Minor issues such as weed control, mechanical injury and algae have been observed, but the majority of the challenges created by wet weather seem to be in bunkers and naturalized roughs.

The playability of bunkers is largely influenced by how much moisture is in the sand. Given the frequency of rain this season, controlling playability in bunkers has been challenging. In addition, wet weather exposes weaknesses in bunker infrastructure. If bunkers experience frequent washouts, standing water or have significant soil contamination then some level

of renovation should be considered. Repairing washouts is labor intensive and the frequency of washouts can be greatly reduced by a successful renovation.

Naturalized rough areas have been healthy and dense this season. Unfortunately, when these areas are too dense golf balls become hard to find, recovery shots become more difficult and pace of play can suffer. Plentiful rain has promoted lush growth in naturalized roughs, but few options to reduce density are available. Mowing is the best option for improving playability midseason, but removing seedheads will have an aesthetic impact. Seasonal maintenance practices to improve the playability of naturalized areas include:

- Eliminating irrigation and fertility
- Mowing, scalping or verticutting depending upon current density
- Sand capping
- Applying growth regulators

A break from the rain would be welcomed by most in the Northeast, especially with August aeration approaching. If weather trends shift and we begin to experience prolonged periods of dry weather, particularly with low relative humidity, be prepared for stress to develop from issues such as Pythium root rot, nematodes, take-all patch and summer patch. All of these pathogens compromise the root system, which elevates the importance of water management if dry conditions develop. Aeration can exacerbate the impact of pathogens as well, so setting a backup date for aeration is recommended. Aeration rain dates should also be used if the weather is too hot, just as they would if it were raining.

Fortunately, conditions this season have not been as challenging as last summer. However, remember that it is important to implement [defensive management practices](#) when weather is unfavorable. By doing so, course conditions will be much better for golf throughout late summer and fall.

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