

SPECIAL REPORT: THE DELUGE

From mid-June of 1972 when Hurricane Agnes rampaged up the East Coast and threw a final paralyzing punch at the Harrisburg-Wilkes Barre region until this spring when the Mississippi River swelled beyond its banks from somewhere north of St. Louis all the way down to the Gulf, the idea has grown that for the last 10 months or so the Eastern half of the United States has been continuously under water. That's what all those pictures in the newspapers and on TV have shown.

If it had started with Agnes and ended with the spring floods, with nothing in between, perhaps conditions wouldn't have been so bad. But late last August and steadily through the fall, the Midwest got plastered with rains such as it may have never seen before. And a little later on and lasting until April of this year, the Southeast was continually drenched. Even the Pacific Coast, which is usually arid in its southern portion, wasn't spared. In the last year, the Los Angeles-San Diego area has had 25 inches of rain compared to a normal 12, and from San Francisco north there has been from 30 to 50 per cent more rain than expected.

Golf, like every other business that is vulnerable to the weather's whims, has been hurt in the last year. But far from irreparably. On the whole, damage to courses has been minimal. Economically, though, it's a different story. Professionals from Richmond, Va., to the Poconos in Pennsylvania, in the belt where Agnes did the most damage, have had to write off the last half of the 1972 season. In the Midwest, business never really took off, due to a rather long succession of cancelled weekends in May and June and late season rains, which knocked out many tournaments and greatly cut down on fall play. In the Southeast, the rounds played were sharply reduced by poor weather that came on late in November and didn't ease off until April. In the Far West, business was poor in the first three months of this year. Palm Springs was cold, and Los Angeles-San

Severe flooding has inundated many courses, but physical damage has been minimal. Economically, it's another story: play is down and *Poa annua* is up by JOE DOAN

Diego was wet and foggy.

The 1973 season, sad to report, hasn't started out to be a banner year. The Southeast and Pacific Coast, as noted, were limping in the early months. Many courses in the Mississippi area, in lower Louisiana and from around Memphis to Davenport, Iowa, were cleaning up after being partially or entirely flooded. Farther north, superintendents were faced with the touch and go problem of getting mowers and spray rigs out. May was a tough month, but then it usually is. Or, at least, it has been for the last five or more years. The Memorial Day weekend may have been washed out in the entire eastern portion of the United States. The weather map was slashed with rain symbols from the central states eastward.

Even though the miserable weather has caused so much disruption to the golf business in the last year, with the exception of Hurricane Agnes, it hasn't been violent. Along the Mississippi this spring, for example, great ice jams, which are usually responsible for quick cresting and flash flooding, were absent. Rather, steady day-in, day-out rains slowly built up to the worst conditions in more than 20 years from around St. Louis southward. Golf courses along the river that were affected weren't eroded or washed out, merely inundated.

A nine hole course north of Greenville, Miss., located on the delta, was flooded entirely to the height of the flagsticks, and a few other courses in the area and on down into Louisiana suffered similar flooding. It takes several weeks before the water abates at these places,

but according to Charles Wilson, Milwaukee Sewerage Commission agronomist, they don't suffer irreversible damage. Silt from the river is poured on silt, which is tolerable. It is when the silt is washed in on sandy soil that the soil's rejection mechanism starts working. The reason that courses in the Scranton-Wilkes Barre region are going to be slow in recovering, if they were flooded last summer by the Susquehanna, is due to the silt-on-sand condition. In a few cases, it was possible for superintendents to wash the silt off the greens within a few days and prevent extensive turf damage, but at some places it was impossible to start cleanup operations in time to save the greens.

Presently, the hardest hit courses in the country are located in the flood plain of the Mississippi and in the Northeastern Pennsylvania area. In the latter section, clean up and restoration work was hampered by a lack of funds. According to reports at this spring's Penn State turf meeting, some of the public courses in the area were able to get low-cost emergency loans to finance restoration, but the loans weren't available to private clubs. In addition, some clubs were practically shut down through the summer months, revenue was cut off, and before restoration of the grounds could begin, financing had to be arranged.

To confound matters, weather in northeastern Pennsylvania was poor this spring. Ray Gettles, pro-superintendent at the Iran Temple Club in Wilkes Barre, said that it was impossible to get equipment out on the course during April, and May wasn't much better, with rain holding up maintenance and play seven times in the first 22 days. At Saucon Valley, 80 miles to the southeast, it rained every other day through the first three weeks of May. Mowing was irregular, but, fortunately, cool nights retarded growth, and superintendent Dave Miller and his crew never got so far in the hole that they couldn't catch up. Saucon Valley is no place to fall behind. It has 63 holes.

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Along the Mississippi and especially in the Memphis-St. Louis region, many courses were afflicted with spring deadspot, a disease that attacks bermudagrass and is similar to snow mold. It is not an aftermath of rain or flooding, but is aggravated by excessive water. According to Marion Johnson, superintendent at the Country Club of Jackson, Miss., deadspot started to form in the fall and bloom in the spring. No control for it has been discovered. To get rid of it, it is necessary to aerate, pour on fungicides and re-plug, but it is usually the end of May at the earliest before it clears up. Johnson was able to keep it out of his greens by covering them with wheat straw during January and February.

Jim Moncrief, the United States Golf Assn. agronomist who covers the Southeast, says there was more evidence of deadspot throughout his territory than has been seen in several years. The Southeast was quite hard hit this winter, Moncrief reports, by heavy, even excessive, rains and unusually cold weather. He was somewhat discouraged with over-all turf conditions until the end of April, but May brought a fairly definite turnabout in the weather and by the end of the month things were getting back to normal.

The cold, wet spring, preceded by an equally cold, wet 1972 autumn, produced a lot of *Poa annua* in the Southeast, especially in Georgia. *Poa* goes out early in the South—in May in Florida, early June in Georgia and a few weeks later on farther north. Southern superintendents are combatting its early fadeout by generous overseeding, especially of greens, with Seaside bent being preferred for the latter. Marion Johnson, working with Dr. Euell Coats, Mississippi State agronomist, has been able to effectively eradicate *Poa annua* at the Country Club of Jackson in the last three years, mainly with the use of KERB, a pre-emergent herbicide, generously combined with a wetting agent.

In recent years, superintendents in the South have become vastly more aware of the need for better drainage. Along with this, new courses are being built with more elevated and better drained tees and greens. The USGA has been advocating this for many years, and Moncrief feels that the way in which most courses have

withstood the near super-abundance of rain in recent months is proof that the idea is paying off.

Hardest hit of the Southeastern courses, besides those in Louisiana and Mississippi, were the layouts in and around Chattanooga. Six or seven inches of rain in one day in April put five feet of water in the Brainerd CC clubhouse and flooded several holes. Several other clubs were almost as hard hit. Among them were Creek's Bend and Battlefield, which have fairways in the flood plains of rivers or creeks and were extensively flooded. Some of the greens at these clubs were under water for four or five days, but all came back in good shape. Moncrief is surprised they did. Play in the Chattanooga area, as in so many cities in the South, is year-around. Courses never get a rest and compaction is never alleviated. When a course is flooded, at least one good runoff avenue is blocked until the water can start worming its way downward. One of the marvels of the golf business, in Moncrief's estimation, is how quickly some superintendents can bring their courses back, with little turf loss, after they have been inundated. The USGA green section specialist, for one, would like to see Southern courses taken out of play for at least a couple of months at the height of the dormant season. This would give superintendents a clear shot at aerating fairways and relieving some of the compaction problem and do repair work, if necessary, on drainage systems.

That these measures are necessary, critically so, is evidenced by the over-all condition of bermuda fairways, not only in Georgia, Tennessee and the Southeastern states, but those, farther west in Oklahoma and Texas. As of mid-May, fairways in the South were in perhaps as poor condition as Moncrief had seen them in 15 or more years of visiting courses in the region. The combination of heavy rains and a cool spring, especially the latter, greatly retarded growth of the bermudagrass.

Year-around play, one of the burdens of the South as far as agronomists and superintendents are concerned, has its counterpart in early play that is demanded in the North. Lee Record, the USGA's green section man who covers 15 states in the

Midwest, feels that Northern players shouldn't start thinking about starting to play until at least May 1. Cold winters and cool springs preclude it, or should, because normally the turf isn't ready for traffic much earlier than this date. It's not so much that the bluegrass fairways can't take it—it's that the bentgrass greens aren't ready until the temperatures get up to and stay in the 60s during the daytime. At courses where there are both bentgrass fairways and greens, the season's opener probably should come later than May 1. But like everyone else, Record recognizes that the current pattern isn't likely to be changed. The superintendent can keep the course closed so long, but the pressure from players wanting to get out and get swinging becomes relentless, and everyone knows who has to give in.

In spite of all the rain that fell late last summer and during the fall, Record's 15-state domain was in good shape this spring. That is, barring that stretch of land from around Davenport, Iowa, to St. Louis. A few low lying holes at the Quincy (Ill.) CC were knocked out, and at Arsenal GC, below Davenport, the drainage gates at this island course had to be closed as the Mississippi neared its crest stage. The course became flooded or semi-flooded for about two weeks, which encouraged a heavy crop of *Poa annua* and a fairly strong outbreak of leaf spot. At Milan, Ill., the back nine at Mill Creek, also an island course located in the Mississippi, was flooded. So were some holes on courses in the Alton, Ill., and St. Louis area.

There was plenty of rain, especially from mid-March until mid-April. Coming in the wake of last fall's monsoons, the spring rains brought thousands of Midwest rivers and streams up to around flood stage and caused apprehension among many superintendents. But eventually their biggest complaint was to be that they couldn't put mowers, spray rigs and other heavy equipment out on the grounds. That is common in the spring. Leaf spot wasn't overwhelming, but it was more in evidence around May 1 than it had been for many years. This was due, Record points out, to the over-all succulence of the turf following all the rain that had fallen in the previous year.

What undoubtedly saved the Mid-

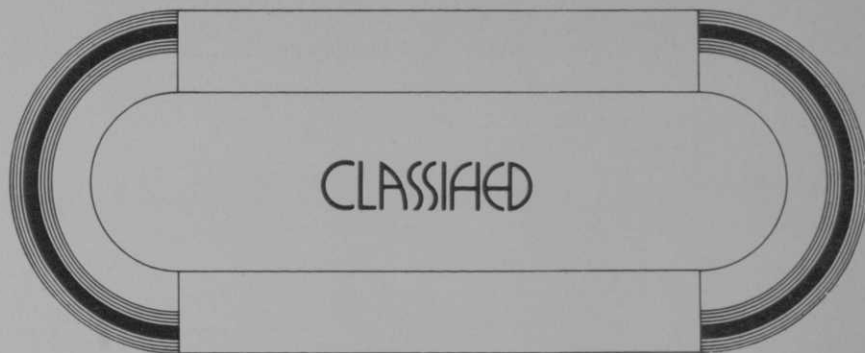
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west and Northern states from big scale flooding was that the 1972 to 1973 winter was mild and dry. In May, Minnesota and the Dakotas were reporting a shortage of soil moisture. There was very little snow-mold, either in these three states or others in the vicinity of the Canadian border. Farther south there wasn't even evidence of it. This is a disease, though, that superintendents know how to ward off through a combination of the right fungicide treatments and good drainage.

You can be sure that drainage was something that occupied the attention of most Midwest and Northern superintendents last fall. Where the heavy rains that came from August on showed up weak spots in a club's drainage system, steps were usually taken to correct them. It's Lee Record's impression, although he hasn't kept a tally on the activity, that there has been more trenching for drain tile and pipe at golf clubs in the last six or eight months than he has ever seen before. And the work hasn't been merely confined to greens and tees and areas surrounding them. A lot of fairways have been torn up in an effort to channel water out of low lying areas. And, at clubs where water crept up to or filtered inside the clubhouse doors, which was rather common last fall, there hasn't been any hesitancy in tearing up parking lots and grounds and installing runoff tiles in them. If nothing else, the weather last year has made superintendents highly sensitive to flooding problems.

It's interesting to note in this vein that Charlie Wilson of Milwaukee Sewerage reaches back into the hundreds of books he has read on golf course construction and maintenance and summons a passage he recalls from a poem written 50 years ago by G.A. Farley. In his introductory remarks, Farley said something to the effect that turf management consists of three main tenets: 1) Drainage; 2) Drainage, and 3) Drainage.

Maybe that sums it up as well as anyone is ever going to say it. For any superintendent who has lived through the ordeal of flood or high water in the last year, there is probably no need to read beyond Farley's introductory remarks. □



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