



Despite our best efforts, weather always has the upper hand when it comes to course conditioning. (Brad Floyd)

WEATHER READY

BY GREEN SECTION STAFF

There is probably no other sport affected more so by weather than golf. Wind, rain, drought and temperature extremes impact how your ball flies in the air and bounces and rolls on the turf. Golf course superintendents strive to maintain resilient surfaces that provide consistent playing conditions despite changes in the weather. For instance, aeration and topdressing programs help soils drain to minimize the impact of rain causing soft conditions. Other projects such as improving drainage, removing trees to enhance growing environments, rebuilding failing greens, establishing stress-tolerant grasses or renovating poor-performing bunkers are completed to achieve better playing conditions in spite of the weather. Courses will also install cart paths to keep the golf course accessible in the event of bad weather.

Despite these efforts, climate and weather continue to influence the game. For example, the moderating impacts of ocean temperatures can make coastal golf courses play and perform differently than their inland neighbors. This is especially evident when cold ocean temperatures cool the air and produce fog

that slows turf growth. A carefully planned maintenance program may help to reduce the impact of cool coastal temperatures, but not until water temperatures warm will coastal golf courses perform similarly to their inland neighbors.

The obvious effects of severe weather are easy to understand, but subtle or indirect weather impacts often are more confusing and frustrating. The lack of adequate sunlight associated with extended periods of overcast, cloudy weather can impact the growth and vigor of warm-season grasses like bermudagrass. On the other hand, elevated temperatures and high humidity can be detrimental to cool-season grasses like bentgrass. The cumulative effects of adverse weather conditions will influence maintenance and playing conditions. Bad weather impacts are never welcomed but are sometimes unavoidable despite even the best efforts to create resilient playing surfaces.

Weather that affects golf courses the most often occurs when golfers are nowhere to be found. This is certainly the case with cold temperature injury during winter. Flash freezes, freeze and thaw cycles and ice formation often cannot be managed and can bring about catastrophic turf damage. Unfortunately, the damage that appears come springtime can be very disappointing and difficult for golfers to accept.

The weather will continue to affect our game as long as we play golf outdoors. Even as our ability to forecast weather improves and regardless of fast-draining surfaces and more-resilient grasses, there will always be times when course conditions are at the mercy of the weather – and that is not necessarily a bad thing. As Mark Twain once said, “Climate is what we expect, weather is what we get.” Perhaps it is time we, as golfers, strive to become more weather ready and appreciate nature’s subtle – and sometimes sublime – influence on the game we love.