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Heat hits area greens

Local pros work to keep courses healthy



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The Chattanooga Golf and Country Club made a rare, but wise decision, last week to shut down play on its course.

The extreme summer heat already experienced to date and more of the same expected has severely impacted its bent grass greens to the point where more play could be devastating to the short grasses.

"We have temporarily closed as a precaution," said head professional Bruce Etter, who is part of a committee meeting weekly on the status of the course.

"The greens are definitely stressing because of not only hot days, but hot nights. Cutting back on rounds will prevent us from having to re-seed in the next couple of weeks. If we can maintain our level of grass, we'll be in grand shape when this heat breaks."

Greg Cole of the National Weather Service in Sevierville, Tenn., said Chattanooga has experienced 56 days at 90 degrees or hotter since May 15th.

Cole described summer conditions in Chattanooga as well above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation. There is little relief in sight from the heat for golfers or greens.

"There is still a lot of concern going forward because there is no relief in sight," said The Farm Golf Club general manager Deck Cheatham. "You don't get comfortable until Sept. 15 or so. The heat can stay pretty strong until then."

The heat is causing problems not only in the Chattanooga area and throughout the South, but all across the country.

The Wall Street Journal reported that five-time U.S. Open site Winged Foot in Maraoneck, N.Y., is having serious weather-related problems with its turf.

"Pete Dye called from Indianapolis and some of the courses up there are having trouble and a friend in Kansas at a Fazio course said it's the worst greens he's had," said The Honors Course superintendent David Stone. "When July came, lots of greens went downhill."

Almost every course in town, especially those with bent grass greens, have suffered at least a little from the conditions. Courses with Bermuda greens, such as Valleybrook and Bear Trace at Harrison Bay, are thriving because that type of grass love the heat but hates the cold.

Black, bare spots, and yellowish leaf blades have no preference from private or public courses and evidence of stress can be seen somewhere on every course.

"We've had so many days of 75 degree lows and 95 degree highs and that averages to 85 degrees," Black Creek Club superintendent Scott Wicker said. "Bent grass doesn't like it when it's 80 degree averages."

Wicker and his staff have been able to minimize stress and damage by mowing less and mowing slightly higher to walk the balance between keeping up the course for the brave golfers who endure the heat.

But Wicker can't afford to mow too close and lose the greens before the Chattanooga Classic rolls into town on Oct. 4.

"The summer has been long and hot just like everywhere else but somehow we've been able to go largely unscathed but there is a lot of summertime left," Wicker said. "The Nationwide Tour event is a season-ending goal and we'll look at that date and work back what we need to do through the course of the year.

"Short-term, we're trying to survive the summertime."



Staff photo by Tim Barber/Chattanooga Times Free Press - Tom Baird lines up a putt on the 11th during his State Match Play championship round at Chattanooga Golf and Country Club on Friday. Baird took the match in a playoff situation over his opponent Tony Green.

Advice from a pro

Chattanooga Golf & Country Club head professional Bruce Etter has three pieces of advice for golfers to help save greens this summer.

1. When on the practice green, move around as much as possible. So don't stand and putt from the same distance at the same hole for too long.
2. Repairing ball-marks is of the utmost importance, as is doing so properly. It is important to push down and fill in the mark instead of lifting up from the roots.
3. Avoid the stressed areas of the greens which are typically near the collars, the edge of the greens and near humps and ridges on the surface.

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