

emerald **SPORTS**

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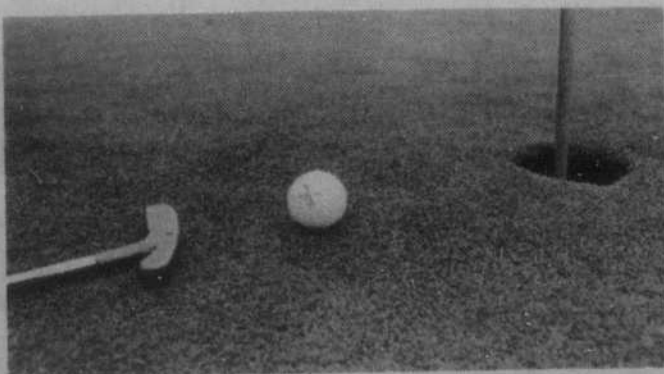
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Springing into action on the links

Braving the elements, there're plenty of places to let the chips fall

Story by Mike Riplinger
Photos by Bob Baker



Golfing in Oregon in the springtime always pits the duffer against the elements.

The usual rain, wind and a little bit of sunshine now and again is expected, but to face record monsoons, hail, sleet and even snow isn't playing fair.

Maybe God has given up on his putting and has taken up bowling.

Indoors may be the place to be after the unusually heavy rains, but area golf courses have been slowly drying out.

With an interest in checking out the area's courses and a chance to improve my horrendous handicap, I embarked on my own mini-PGA Tour — or Pathetically Gross Attempt as my playing partners called it.

While my hacking did improve, my supply of golf balls didn't. I lost balls not only because of my duck hooks and ugly slices, depending on what I was screwing up at the time, but also at the phenomenon of "plug balls," which are known to frequent many Willamette Valley courses.

That is the cruel situation where a nice high shot zips into the cloud-filled sky, only to land in the muck and mire of the fairway, never to be seen again. There is nothing more infuriating than hitting a nice shot into the middle of the fairway and then being able to find it because it sunk into the mud.

God must have a sense of humor.

The wet winter does leave one advantage. No matter how much you skull your approach shots to the green, just about anything will stay on. That means even those rocket wedge shots which don't get above 10 feet off the ground will have a chance.

With that optimistic note in mind, knowing I had nothing to lose, I proceeded to make the rounds.

Tokatee Golf Club, 48 miles east of Eugene on Highway 126. A gorgeous golf course that is surrounded by a small mountain range with the Three Sisters laying in the background. Easily the most scenic of the region's courses, which serves to bely the often difficult 6,327 yard par-72 course.

Tokatee was listed by Golf Digest in 1981 as one of country's top 50 public courses and lives up to its ranking.

The course is in fairly good condition despite the heavy rains. The back nine, though, opened just last weekend because of the monsoons. The greens have recently been aerated, but should prove to be in good shape in the weeks ahead.

Pick up your strokes early on this course, because the back nine is difficult.

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