Rulewich’s Saratoga National opens in Adirondacks

By Jay Finegan

SARATOGA, N.Y. — This Adirondack resort town, best known for its thoroughbred race track and 19th-century Victorian architecture, finally has a high-end daily-fee course. Saratoga National Golf Course, designed by Roger Rulewich, opened over Memorial Day weekend and should be in good trim for the affluent crowd of “summer people” who flock here for the cool mountain air.

Set by the shores of Lake Lonely, the 7,200-yard track plays through a former horse farm. Rulewich navigated the routing around a complex pattern of wetlands, traversed by 23 wooden bridges that lend the course a special charm.

Extensive stonework gives strong definition to green complexes, wetland edges and the clubhouse. Multiple tees, wide fairways and generous targets create an inviting atmosphere for each hole. A creek flows lazily through the property.

Writing Checks

All told, it’s a sharp new layout with plenty of interesting features. According to Rulewich, owners and developers Tom Newkirk and Bob Howard spared no expense in building the best course possible.

“They turned out to be some of the easiest clients we’ve ever worked with,” he said. “They’ve been excited about this project from day one and have been out on the site a great deal, watching it happen. And when anything came up that looked like it might help the course, they were ready to write a check. We couldn’t ask for anything more.”

To avoid some of the grow-in issues, for example, they agreed to sod 74 acres.

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promises to pose some stiff challenges from the back pegs, including some potential round-wreckers. A good example is a par-3 hole design that Engh modeled after the famous "Dell" hole at Ireland's Lahinch.

"I came across this sort of hole in the ground," he said. "I actually cut a little avenue through it with a little sliver of fairway coming through, with this monstrous green. It plays a variety of lengths, from 100 yards back to 250 yards. We have an elevated tee, and from the back you've got to carry a drive into this hole in the ground where the green is. It's going to require a 250-yard poke.

"Because the wetlands were there, we couldn't make it like, say, 210 yards," Engh added. "That's the thing about this course - because of the forced carries out there, it is going to play extremely difficult from the back tees."

**SAILING OUT**

Taking mercy, Engh designed "bail out" sites on all shots, except from the back tees.

"From the next tee up, what we call the main tee, everybody has a bail out," he said. "You can always take a different route. For the hackers, I moved the tees up, and the forced carries are out of play. On the third hole, for example, the front two tees don't have to carry anything. But from the back, you have to carry it 220 yards over the wetlands, and that's all there is to it.

"It's the same for every course I do," Engh explained. "My MO is that, if you pick the wrong tees to play from, you're probably not going to have fun. If you go back too far, you're going to get your tail kicked. But if you happen to pick the right tee for your game and ability, you're going to have a ball."

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**Cupp's Verandah**

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said Cupp was asked to handle the project based on his track record of designing courses in concert with the natural surroundings. "We knew that working with Bob on this site would help us maximize the existing character of the property," she said.

**SIMILARITIES TO SHADOW WOOD**

Cupp said the oak trees will be used on most of the holes, particularly the ninth and 18th. Additionally, the course will finish amidst the main oak hammock.

"Because of the trees, the landforms of the course will be mostly subtle and will reflect a more traditional design that is normally seen up north," he said. "Regarding strategy and conditioning, this course will be very similar to those at Shadow Wood. And strategically, the length, the diversity of the holes and the dimensions will be similar. However, aesthetically, this course will be completely unique from any other course in the area and will reflect the 'old Florida' feel of the property."

Located on property formerly known as the Baucom Ranch, Verandah is bordered by 1.5 miles of the Orange River. The central feature in the community will be the river village, a gathering place comprised of individual amenity buildings, including a golf pro shop, a restaurant, a tennis/fitness area and a nature center, all within a large oak hammock.

**36 HOLES OF GOLF**

Verandah is being planned as a low-density community, with an average of approximately one residence per acre. The site design incorporates pedestrian walkways along the riverfront and winding throughout the community.

At least 65 percent of the property will be open space with natural preserve areas, parks, wetlands, lakes, 36 holes of golf, and a buffer along the river to help maintain the unique character of the riverfront. Verandah will offer a mix of single-family, villa and coach homes initially ranging in price from $150,000 to $500,000.

The Bonita Bay Group is a diversified company involved in the planning, development, sales and management of master-planned communities and free-standing recreational facilities throughout Southwest Florida. The company employs more than 1,200 individuals and operates five master-planned communities - Bonita Bay, The Brooks, Mediterra, TwinEagles and Verandah - along with 11 golf courses and two marinas.
"We sodded everything except the fairways and the green surfaces, which we seeded with bent," Rulewich said. "All the roughs were sodded, and we carried that sod all the way to our edges."

Saratoga Sod supplied the turf and Chesapeake Turf, of Salisbury, Md., rolled it in.

CLUBHOUSE OF STONE

Similarly, Newkirk and Howard admired some of the stonework the designer used to buttress one of the greens, and consequently authorized a liberal use of stone throughout the property.

"Many of the pond banks and wetland edges, as well as greens and tees, are reinforced and stabilized with stacked stone walls that lend a strong visual element throughout the course," said Rulewich.

"They [the owners] seem to have the wherewithal to do all the nice touches," he added. "They're also building quite a nifty clubhouse for themselves, also using a lot of stonework. It has some unusual features, like a 'zero edge' pool. It's not contained but drops off to a waterfall. They even consider the clubhouse a second home. Upstairs, they have some private quarters for themselves and their golfing buddies."

CARRIES OVER WETLANDS

Working with general contractor Delany Construction, Rulewich's own construction company, a partnership called The Golf Group Inc., handled much of the heavy lifting. "We did the shaping and put the features together and did a lot of the grading on the course," he said.

Starting with a fairly flat piece of ground - open pastures separated by hedgerows of mature trees and brush - work crews moved between 600,000 and 700,000 yards of earth, in the process creating some additional lakes and ponds on the course. Everything eventually drains back into Lake Lonely.

"The tricky part was dealing with the wetlands, which are scattered throughout the site," Rulewich said. "There are some optional carries across the wetlands that are going to give you a feeling of being somewhere else rather than in the Adirondacks."

"ISLAND GREEN ON 14TH"

Indeed, with wetlands at every turn, against the backdrop of a large lake, the layout and setting of this course take on a coastal marshland character. "We thought Lake Lonely would be a major feature of the course," Rulewich explained. "But it was buffered by a major, wooded wetland area, which we were not allowed to go into."

"We brought a couple of holes up to the edge, but we made very limited intrusion into that shoreline," he said. "The 14th hole plays right at the lake, and the 15th is a ponded par-3 that almost looks like an island green. You have to bridge across to it, and the cart path runs behind the green, and you bridge back across what is really a wetland but at times looks like part of the lake."

"We tried to figure out how to bulkhead the 15th green itself, and ended up using some large, very blocky stone," he said. "It has a stone edge all the way around - it's a pretty hole. You're looking at water running around both sides, so it really is, in effect, an island green."

The superintendent at Saratoga National is Joe Lucas.

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Tullymore

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healthy and great, but it happens to be young, carts will knock it down pretty fast," he said. "I think the sod will pay for itself many times over, just by keeping conditions good, cutting down on erosion, and keeping cart traffic at a manageable wear level."

RBI Golf out of Denver, which also built Engh's The Golf Club at Redlands Mesa, handled the construction, and Engh had high praise for the firm. "Wayne Metcalf was the on-site supervisor for RBI, and he did a great job," he said.

Superintendent Alex Greenacre will have his hands full keeping this environmentally sensitive site in good trim. Head professional Kevin O'Brien will oversee Tullymore as well as St. Ivor.