



Reflections on Our

by Ron Bloom, Retired President of Fairways, Inc.

Prairie View Golf Links, Su

Reflections; 45 Years of Golf Course Design and Construction

My name is Ron Bloom. I am now retired as the working president of Fairways, Inc. The company was organized in 1970 with the intention of designing and building golf courses. During the past 45 years, over 86 golf course projects were designed and developed by Fairways, Inc., resulting in over one million rounds of golf played yearly on courses in Minnesota and the surrounding four states.

A short while ago I was asked to write a brief article about what I thought was the biggest change in golf courses since I first began this career.

The obvious big change was the growth of golf itself. Perhaps the smallest change was the disappearance of the night watering man. Notwithstanding the above, I think the aesthetics of golf courses, because of turf research and the many varieties of grasses currently available now, along with the improved equipment and changes in mowing patterns are the biggest noticeable things.

I do remember the way rural courses were mowed. It was with an old Worthington fairway mower and a farm tractor with smooth tires or something very similar. It was usually straight lines and same heights; fairways and



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Superintendent Kevin Black CGCS

roughs. Changes didn't occur very fast or very often. Budgets were the reason. This was a challenge as I got into the golf course architecture and construction. At the time almost all of our work was in rural towns in Minnesota with very limited budgets. As we progressed into the golf course work, Bill Johnson, the superintendent at Edina Country Club, who was a friend of mine, became my partner and mentor on the grasses and greens.

In 1970, Joel Goldstrand, a touring pro, joined our team. He had been playing on the best-groomed grass in the world and so his input was insurmountable. The challenge was to convert that knowledge to rural Minnesota courses

with little or no cost. His suggestions put into practice changes in mowing patterns, which resulted in better contours to give the courses a better look.

As the years went by, construction began to flourish. As research and development of many elite grasses became available, we were able to create more ideas of our own in regard to the use of grasses, mowing patterns and lower costs of maintenance. It became an inexpensive goal of ours in the design and construction of golf courses.

In 1982, Joel designed a Reversible Golf Course. It was a unique design that the golf course can literally be reversed and



played in the other direction, thereby obtaining the variety of two courses for the construction costs of building only one. There was one fairway for two holes and thus they were uniquely mowed. The site was 80% wooded, so many trees were selected to stay or clear in designing tee locations for 18 holes and mowing to that specific fairway. It was the first one built in the world and named the Double Eagle Golf Club, Eagle Bend, Minnesota.

original design idea of Joel Goldstrand He came up with the idea of bent grass targets within the bluegrass fairways. Maintaining fairway grasses at a low height of cut necessary for superior playing conditions is a fragile and expensive procedure. Using his design plan, we originated the principle of preparing, seeding and maintaining to these extensive requirements only the landing area, so when the hole is properly played, the approach shot will be from ideal turf conditions.

The creation of Target Fairways was an

These areas were surrounded by regular bluegrass fairways. This concept greatly reduces the cost of construction and maintenance, enhances the aesthetics of the course and gives players from all four sets of tees the optimum playing conditions if they hit their shots in the proper area. Willow Run Golf Club, located in Sioux Falls, South Dakota was the first course designed and built in the world with target fairways in 1986 by Fairways, Inc. The total target fairways area was approximately 4.5 acres. We have constructed several other golf courses in this unique fashion. Fox Hollow Golf Club in Rogers, Minnesota, Grand National in Hinkley, and Lake Geneva in Alexandria are three more of them.

Some other unique notes of interest we have practiced throughout the years, are the restoration of native prairie grasses for course aesthetics, shot definition, and decreased maintenance costs. We began this program in 1980 with the construction of Prairie View Golf Course in Worthington, Minnesota. The Wildflower Golf Club in Detroit Lakes is a hallmark of this design. We designed and built it in 1992 with many acres of tall fescues and wildflowers sown in strategic areas.

Over the past 45 years, the varieties of grass seed have become so specialized and numerous with the strains and colors

available, that today an architect could be considered an artist with a brand new handful of paint brushes and imagination his only guide. The mowing patterns will follow. Renovations will be unique.

The fast growing technology of computer science continues to complement the superintendent's work, with more applications to solve problems regarding sun and shade, water and wind, etc. It seems the only vision remaining is robotic mowing by GPS. There will be less tennis shoes in the lunch room. That will be a shame.

*Opposite: Grand National in Hinkley.
Superintendent Steven Benson*

Below: Ron Bloom

