

## Reef Course joins Dick Wilson design on Grand Bahama

By JAY FINEGAN

GRAND BAHAMA ISLAND, Bahamas — A new Robert Trent Jones Jr. layout has opened for play here on Grand Bahama — the first new course to be built in the Bahamas since 1969. The Reef Course joins the Lucayan Country Club course, a Dick Wilson design that dates back to 1962.

Both courses are part of the newly refurbished and renamed Our Lucaya Resort, the largest and most expensive Caribbean property in development at more than \$400 million. The resort also recently opened a Butch Harmon School of Golf, one of only two in the world. Harmon currently coaches Tiger Woods.

The Reef Course, a daily-fee facility, is a links-style track that stretches to 6,920 yards from the championship tees. It lies atop a course built in 1968, which went defunct in the early 1980s.

"It lay fallow for close to 20 years," said Ty Butler, vice president at the Jones golf architectural firm and lead designer on the Reef project. "There were a few resemblances of old bunkers and old greensites, and there were mounds and depressions here and there, but the course was totally overgrown. There was really nothing left of the old design. We came in and completely redid it — new greens, new bunkers. We recontoured

the entire site."

Butler described the course as a resort layout built mainly for the average player. "It's a low-lying, gently rolling course that's not meant to beat anybody up," he said. But he added that it "held its ground pretty well" in the December kickoff event, the two-day Senior Slam, won at nine under by Hale Irwin. It was the first major PGA Tour event in the Bahamas since 1971. In fact, the Senior Slam will be played here at the Reef Course for the next two years.

### DECEPTIVELY DIFFICULT

Gary Slatter, director of golf operations for both courses at Our Lucaya, expects the Reef Course to log about 26,000 rounds a year, at the cart-included cost of \$120 for daily-fee players or \$100 for guests at the resort.

"We'll have 1,350 guest rooms here," he said, "with more flights coming in from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom." The island lies 55 miles east of Miami, a mere 35 minutes by air.

Slatter said players might find the Reef Course deceptively difficult. "We have a classic Dick Wilson course here, which is entirely tree-lined," he said. "And we have this new Reef Course, which is more open-looking, although it has 13 lakes. The Wilson course channels your thoughts to hit in a straight line, whereas at the Reef, there's a lot more space around the



The 16th hole at the Our Lucaya Reef Course, on Grand Bahama Island, which opened in December.

greens. But when you miss the green here, all of a sudden you realize, 'Oh geez, there's a lake there, or a bunker.'"

Reef Course superintendent Hiram Hield, a 26-year veteran of Our Lucaya (formerly called the Lucayan Resort), has planted the greens with Tifdwarf and the fairways and roughs with 419 Bermudagrass. He irrigates the layout with well water, but the system is also hooked up with an effluent source. "Grand Bahama has a good fresh water supply under it, compared to the other islands," said Slatter.

### CHINESE CONTROLLED

In addition to the two courses and the

guest accommodations, the Our Lucaya resort features a yacht marina, an 80-outlet marketplace, an "African village" and numerous restaurants. A 30,000-square-foot casino, with 30 gaming tables, will add a James Bond touch to the resort when it opens this spring.

The entire complex is owned by Hong Kong-based Hutchinson Whampoa, one of the world's largest shipping and property companies. The firm has bought Grand Bahama's main airport and harbor. It also owns the shipping terminals at both ends of the Panama Canal. Our Lucaya is the company's first non-Asian resort venture.

## Player

Continued from previous page

land into undulating, dune-style terrain. Each hole received attention to detail to ensure that the overall balance in terms of length, position of hazards and shot values are in harmony. As a result, the 7,234-yard layout will pose a challenge in all weather conditions.

"Our brief from the Fancourt owners was for a course that will rate in the world's top 100 within five years, and we intend to achieve that goal," said Phil Jacobs, the chief designer for the Player group. "It is the only links-style course in the country planted with cool season grasses," primarily Kentucky Blue, rye, fescue and bent. The greens are Dominant Bent.

"Words cannot describe this project," said superintendent Kosie Mentz. "All credit must go to Hasso and Sabine Plattner and the Gary Player Company for creating such an awesome project. I have no doubt in my mind that The Links will be the best maintained golf course in the country."

### THE KILIMANJARO HOLE

The Links features some extraordinary holes. The par-3 second — "Lang Drop" — for example, has a bunker in the heart of an enormous green.

"We included the bunker in the green to break it up," Player explained. "The front left of the green is sloped severely, so the golfer can use the contours to get the ball to any part of the green with a putter. You will never be stymied by the trap."

Added designer Jacobs: "This sort of thing is only really associated with links

courses, and links breaks the rules of design. We want to keep the element of quirkiness that is characteristic of links golf."

Most surprising is the amount of elevation change on the course. "There is a lot of movement in the fairways as well as the dunes," wrote Stuart McLean, in *Golf Digest's* South Africa edition. "You find yourself playing both uphill and downhill at times, most dramatically to the raised green at number 10, aptly named 'Kilimanjaro,' a hole which is straight out of Royal Portrush — one of the few Irish courses to host the British Open."

Player himself drew a similar comparison. "At this new course, we'll be taking South Africans back to the roots of golf and letting them play a British Open of their own," he said.

### CARTS VERBOTEN — ALMOST

The Links is a public course, and it is meant to be walked. Carts are allowed only for medical reasons and must be booked in advance. A "fore caddie" is compulsory for each group of golfers.

Player was gratified that PGA Tour commissioner Tim Finchem had awarded the 2002 Presidents Cup to The Links. "One of our goals with The Presidents Cup is to make it truly an international competition," Finchem said. "By taking it around the world, we are accomplishing that goal and introducing the sport to a new generation of fans."

Player predicted the tournament will prove a huge boon to South African golf and tourism, and said the course is ideal for telecasts. "The magnificent Links Course will be a true test for the world's best golfers," he said, "as well as offering supreme spectator viewing." ■



The 16th hole at Nejapa Country Club in suburban Managua

## Nicaragua set to open first course since Sandinista regime

SANTA ROSA, Calif. — Nicaragua's sole golf course, the Nejapa Country Club, is slated to open next April in suburban Managua, near the Central American country's Pacific coast. Designed by Rick Elliott, a Santa Rosa-based architect with Strategic Golf Design (SGD), the championship 18-hole layout rolls gently through open terrain sparsely punctuated with mango and eucalyptus trees.

The only previous course in Nicaragua was destroyed during the communist Sandinista regime of the 1980s. "Tanks were doing donuts on the greens, and then the squatters came and took over the whole course," said John Millhouse, a designer with SGD. "The members got some sort of settlement out of the government for losing the property, years after the fact, and

that money, plus whatever membership drive they've had, formed the basic funding mechanism."

The land at Nejapa is cut with three small ravines and one large ravine that meander through the site, providing enhanced visual drama and added challenge on seven holes. Three sets of tees offer plenty of length variation, from 4,800 yards at the shortest to 6,800 yards from the blue markers.

The course design includes mass plantings of tropical flowers and evergreen shade trees to curtail the winds, which blow daily at about 20 miles per hour. Native grasses and wildflowers will dominate in out-of-play roughs. The course will feature Tifdwarf hybrid Bermudagrass on greens and Primavera seeded Bermudagrass throughout tees, fairways and roughs.