

## Deep Freeze

TOURNAMENT AT THE TOP OF THE  
WORLD POSES CHALLENGES FOR  
SUPERINTENDENT AND GOLFERS

By James E. Guyette

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**A**t the top of the world — almost 400 miles *above* the Arctic Circle — golfers need to be on top of their games when playing in the Drambuie World Ice Golf Championship. Described as “like playing on the moon,” those teeing off at this year’s tournament in March were far more likely to yell “brrr” than “fore” amid temperatures that fell to minus 14 degrees Fahrenheit.

Held in Uummanaq, Greenland (pronounced “YUM an ahch”), this island course is carved completely from ice. The links are cut into a jagged sheet of 3-foot-thick ice floating atop a frigid fjord. Instead of bunkers and roughs, the hazards include 1,000-year-old icebergs that have randomly fallen away from seven nearby glaciers. It’s not unusual for the entire course to start moving in the middle of play.

The real architect of this course is the ocean, says tournament director Henrik Bergqvist of Denmark, who also serves as the course’s superintendent. The water and weather carve the icebergs in

January and February to form the basic layout of the course, and Bergqvist adds the finishing touches in March.

Using a large wooden tool similar to a hard-edged giant squeegee, Bergqvist fashions the layout by pushing away the Rhinefrost, a snow-and-ice mixture that sets atop the actual ice layer on the fjord. “We don’t use a machine; it’s all done by hand,” Bergqvist says.

Bergqvist uses a 2.5-foot-wide wooden tool mounted on a pole to define the fairways. The greens, natu-

rally, are called “whites” in this frozen wonderland.

“The routing is done between the icebergs like doglegs,” Bergqvist explains. “We actually shave the whites just like real greens.”

Precision putting is augmented by the shaving process, in which the scraper is used to brush away fresh snow to create a good grain. The holes are lined with standard golf cups.

Thirty-one players from around the globe took part in the fourth annual shotgun-start event, where the course changes — drastically — every year.

“I’ve played on hard and fast greens when it gets cold in Kentucky, but nothing can prepare you for this,” says ice golfer Jack O’Keefe. “The ball bounced and reacted like it was hit on asphalt.”

An American who plays on the Pro Developmental Players Tour, O’Keefe came in second this year to Scotland’s Roger Beames, the first player to ever shoot par on the nine-hole course.

O’Keefe observes that the surroundings reminded him of “the final scene in the Superman movie where Clark Kent flies back to Krypton.”

Uummanaq, off the West Coast of northern Greenland, is accessible by helicopter or dogsled. During the tournament, social activities with the friendly locals dominate much of the time spent off-course. “Golfers are always looking for a great locker-room story, and there’s no greater story than this,” says Tom Ferrell, a tournament participant from Colorado.



(Left) A golfer hits his fluorescent orange ball out of the “rough.” (Right) The winner gets an odd-looking trophy.