

Champion Bermuda, Relocated Bunkers Await PGA

Though the PGA Championship was played there 10 years ago, players will see a much different course than what they saw when David Toms won in 2001.

In that time, the course has undergone a greens renovation, changing out its Crenshaw bentgrass greens for Champion ultradwarf bermudagrass greens. It's also moved bunkers — in 2001, fairway bunkers were located between 240 and 270 yards off the tee. In 2011, they'll be 280 to 340 yards off the tee. The bunkers have also been made deeper, with steeper faces, and the fairways are even tighter than they were in 2001, thanks to a renovation by golf course architect Rees Jones.

"The best decision the club ever made was going from bentgrass — which does not provide great summer greens in the Southeast, in my opinion — to a grass that I can give my members top playing conditions on a daily basis," says Kasey Kauff, head superintendent of the Highlands course at AAC. "The bent was always on life support. We all know how hot it gets in Atlanta in the summer. With Champion, I consistently can provide greens rolling over 12 with the firmness members desire."

Architect Rees Jones, whose father, Robert Trent Jones Sr., designed nine holes of the Highlands Course in 1967 (the other nine holes designed by Joe Finger), says that the course will still play somewhat similarly to how it played in 2001 because of the way technology has added length to the professional's game.

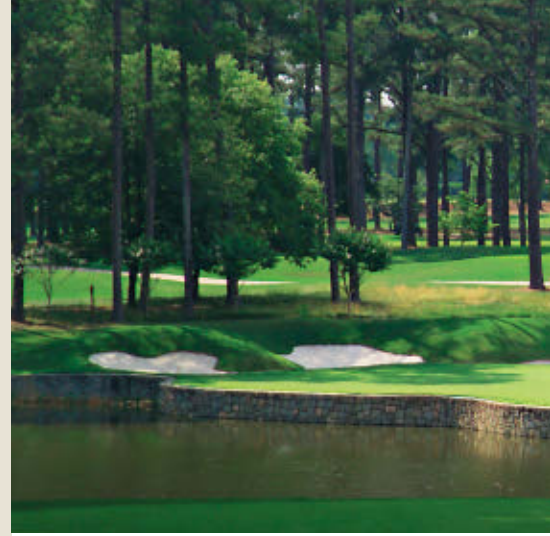
"We've added length, dropped some tees, on No. 6 we added a pond, we've set up a par 5 to be a drivable par 4, which is the latest thing in championship golf," Jones says. "One thing we didn't change was the contour of the greens. We changed the turf, so now the contours will be noticeable because the greens won't be stiff and wet, they'll be fast and firm, so the ball will break more."

Mangum says that the addition of Champion bermudagrass has eased his mind in the weeks leading up to the tournament.

"You look at having an event in August in the South... that's the last month you'd pick to have a major event on bentgrass greens," he says. "In 2001 we were in a situation (with bentgrass greens) where as the rounds went up, the conditions went down. Now, with Champion, as rounds go up, conditions go up."

Mangum uses an interesting statistic to drive home his point: In 2001, the course experienced 8 hours of temperatures above 90 degrees from June 15th to August 15th. In 2010, during the same time period? A whopping 760 hours above 90.

And of course the players will see a longer Atlanta Athletic Club than they did in 2001. For the 2011 PGA Championship, the Highlands Course will play to 7,467 yards and a par of 70. In 2001 the course played at 7,194 yards and a par of 70. — S.J.



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Family first

Mangum's three kids are adults now, but he recalls a scene from when two were in second grade like it was yesterday.

The event was called "Donuts for Dads." All the fathers were invited to come in and have donuts with the kids in the class. It was doubly important for Mangum to be there, as he had his two youngest, Trey (now 31) and Hayley (now 29), both in that same class.

Mangum sat there in a chair too small for him, with Trey on one side, Hayley on the other, munching away on glazed donuts. Another little boy sat at their table, nervously watching the door.

After about 30 minutes passed, some dads were getting up to leave.

"I'll never forget this," Mangum says some 20 years later. "This little boy looked at me and said, 'Well... I guess he's not coming.'"

The memory can make Mangum glassy-eyed to this day.

"It broke my heart, but at the same time I'm glad I saw it, because it made me be there for as many of the kids' events as possible after that," he says.

Mangum says his employer — he had just started at Atlanta Athletic Club at the time — understood the importance of being there for family.

"It was the same guy who hired me, a guy by the name of Gaylord Coan," Mangum says. "He told me, 'This is a big job, and a busy job. But you'll get in more trouble with me if you neglect your family than if you neglect your job.'"

