

New range plays as good as a round

Commonwealth National Golf Club in Cranberry, NJ, has reworked its driving range into a practice area with variety.

By JOHN CALSIN, JR.

Superintendent Larry Schlippert, CGCS, says he's wanted to do something like this for years, and finally got the money to make it happen. His range is ready! The new driving range at Common-

wealth National Golf Club, Cranberry, NJ, is a model practice area for visitors to this 400-acre course. Schlippert hopes Commonwealth's new range will give other superintendents an idea of what they can accomplish with a small piece of land.

"We've done a lot here, and we didn't get involved with a whole ton of reconstruction. Existing features were made to stand out and work for us."

Golfers love to visit the secluded, quiet range to relax and practice with no interruptions.

Economical use of space

"With the amount of space we had to work with, it is a well-designed plan that

accomplished many different things in the practice area," says Terry Tumolo, Commonwealth general manager.

"For clubs that don't have 50 acres to work with for their ranges, it is a great model to come and see."

Amelia Rorer, teaching pro in her first year at Commonwealth says the driving range was a deciding factor in her decision

to join the team.

"To be able to teach the whole game, you need to hit every shot," says Rorer. "Most [driving ranges] do not have a short game practice area. It was a wonderful design."

From 'blah' to a blast

The original range was a four-acre parcel in the middle of the golf course. It consisted of a 7500 square-foot, two-tiered practice tee. The remaining turf was a maintained area of about 3½ acres of ¼-inch bentgrass, with mounded turf targets.

The range is about 100 yards wide, and is no longer a dull and lifeless piece of ground.

"The range was kind of blah" says Schlippert. "It was like a driving range. The golfers wanted more of a target, something they could hit shots to."

Members originally wanted to move the facility to a different area, says Schlippert, who persuaded them to adapt to a short game practice area.

Most finish work was done in house.

That 'range of dreams' would also have to be versatile enough for golfers to use a variety of clubs. Ideally, says Schlippert, golfers could practice shot placement as well as distance.

Jim Blaukovitch was chosen to be range architect. He came up with a plan to enhance the four-acre area, one that would allow golfers to use every club in the bag. The target areas range from 35 to 240 yards. Bunker shots are now possible, to the fairway and greens.

Golfers also have a choice of matted or grassy tee areas.

Use existing turfgrass

The total project cost about \$75,000, including labor and in-house materials. Schlippert and his crew moved all the sod and did all the final grading. An earth moving company did the earth work, and installed the irrigation and drainage. All the soil and bentgrass came from the site or other locations around the course.



Looking down the range from the tee area, the bunkers and flags are clear targets.



Superintendent Larry Schlippert, CGCS surveys the range. Grass tees are at right; chip-ping bunker and putting green are behind.

The only imported materials were the fescue sod and the seed bed mix for the tees.

Fescue sod covers an area of 42,000 square feet. It was installed around the target greens and around the traps.

All bentgrass was recycled from other areas around the course. Schlippert wanted to save as much bentgrass as possible from the fairways, to use on tees. Traps were marked off; sod was stripped from areas where bunkers were to be placed and saved so the traps could be built over winter.

The sod was put in the woods next to the range, on top of four-mill plastic, so it wouldn't take root. Schlippert covered the sod with a geotextile material so it would not desiccate through dehydration. The sod sat in the woods from December of 1997 to March 18, 1998, and survived without irrigation.

"The ironic thing was, we started this project in late November of 1997 in anticipation of heavy earth work and trap construction during freezing weather, which we never got."

Thanks to an unseasonably warm winter, rain was the chief weather annoyance, and resulted in piece-meal work.

On Commonwealth's first range, the



Concrete under each mat keeps the mats from getting that spongy, sinking feeling. Drain pipe runs under each slab.

tee was behind the trap. Now, it is located in front. "You never want to put mats in front of a tee, because while the golfers are using the grass tee, they are blowing the dirt and debris up on the mats, which contaminates them."

The mat area is totally drained underneath. "My previous experience with mat-

ting is you've got to have drainage underneath, otherwise it will never stay level."

The entire length of the matted area has a trench cut through the middle, one foot wide and up to two feet deep, with perforated pipe laid in the trench for the main drain. This is covered with stone.

The stone area serves as a drain field during heavy rain. The grassy tee area slopes back toward the stones, which channels rainwater to the drains.

The tee boxes are surrounded by six inches of crushed stone. Wood frames outline each matted tee area. The mats are set on four inch concrete slabs to keep them solid and level.

Granite yardage markers will be placed at different distances from target areas. Schlippert will laser the distance from each marker to the nine different colored flags on the range. Marker #1 therefore, will have nine different yardages; marker number two will have nine more, etc.

A score card will give the distance from each marker to each flag. The tee is 250 feet wide. With the specific yardage from each stone, a golfer will be able to sharpen his or her accuracy. This should help a golfers short range game.

Each day, certain areas of the tee will be roped off for maintenance and to give the turf a rest.

Commonwealth is owned by Matrix Development, specialists in golf course management and hospitality. □

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