

East Lake Ready for Tour Championship

Superintendent Ralph Kepple has reopened East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta in preparation for the Tour Championship, September 25-28. A year-long renovation began immediately after last year's event is highlighted by replacing the bentgrass greens with MiniVerde bermudagrass.

"This year the first week of June in Atlanta was miserable - upper 90s in the day, mid-70s at night," said Kepple, who has been the superintendent at East Lake for 16 years. "It was more of a July/August type week. A lot of golf courses were already seeing some suffering in their bentgrass greens. I almost felt guilty since I was growing in bermuda, and it was perfect weather for me. All of the construction went extremely well. The changes to the course are great. I think the greens are going to be a home run."

In preparation for the 1963 Ryder Cup, East Lake became one of the first, if not the first, golf courses in Atlanta to install bentgrass putting greens. With the installation of bermudagrass greens, the club has come full circle. In addition to the greens renovation, the green on No. 7 was pushed back 43 yards and reconfigured; the fairway and green on No. 17 were moved left to be closer to East Lake's shoreline; new tees were added on No. 13 and 15 and the back tee on No. 6 was expanded to be used for all four rounds. Rees Jones was the architect for the renovation.

Other changes include the addition of new fairway bunkers on the left side of holes No. 3, 7 and 16, and to the right side of No. 15. Bunkers were reconfigured on the green at No. 16 and expanded on the right side of the green on No. 14, as well as the left side of No. 4 green. New hole locations were created on various greens and low-cut, roll-off areas were installed off of greens on holes No. 2, 3, 7, 8 and 10. For the Tour Championship, the golf course will be a par-70 layout of 7,300 yards.

"I think the course looks and plays great," said PGA Tour player Stewart Cink, who is from the Atlanta area. "Golf course superintendent Ralph Kepple and architect Rees Jones have done a wonderful job on the renovations. The players should really enjoy the challenge. Last year, it was unfortunate that the extreme heat and drought hit the Atlanta region because the course was in perfect shape until Mother Nature's impact was felt about a month out. I thought Ralph and his staff did a remarkable job getting the course to the level of playability that we had. With the switch to bermudagrass on the greens, the heat should not be a factor. The greens roll great and will only get better as they mature."

East Lake switched to MiniVerde, an ultradwarf bermudagrass, because it is better suited for Georgia's hot summers. It provides an excellent putting surface with fine leaf blades, short internodes and high shoot density. MiniVerde produces deep roots and is quick to recover from cultural practices, allowing a tight, fast and consistent putting surface. Kepple expects the greens to measure 12 feet on the stimpmeter for the championship.

"This year with new greens and the bermudagrass, and just being new right now - they're going to be extremely firm," said Kepple, a 26-year GCSAA member who holds an agronomy degree from Ohio State. "I anticipate that not only is it going to be a big difference here this year, but all of the FedExCup events coming into this are being played on bentgrass greens in August and September. So I would expect those courses to have a certain level of softness, just because of a limited root system at that time of year. The same thing we ran into last year - not as bad I'm sure - but that's just typical this time of year. It's hard to maintain a good, dense root system in September. So they're going to come through those first three events on greens that will receive shots pretty well, and then they're going to come here and these greens are going to be very, very firm."

In 2007, when the championship moved up almost two months in the Tour's schedule from late October or early November to mid-September for the inaugural FedEx Cup finale, there was not enough time for the bentgrass greens to adequately recover from Atlanta's hottest summer on record and a drought as well.

Twenty-eight of 31 days in August 2007 were above 90 degrees and 10 days were above 100 degrees. The average high for the month was 96.5, nearly 10 degrees higher than the normal average for August and the average low for the month was 75.2, more than five degrees higher than the normal average for August (which is what was the most challenging because soil temperatures are cumulative and without being able to cool off during the night, the soil temp just keeps building each day with that kind of heat). Only three days the entire month were cloudy and direct sunlight also increases soil temperatures.

Georgia's drought continues today and the state has restricted East Lake's water use 35 percent. GCSAA's Georgia chapter has been working with state officials to ease water restrictions for the golf industry and assist courses to employ best management practices for responsible water use.

Cape's revival as Masonboro CC moving along

By [Brian Mull](#)
Staff Writer

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Palm trees stand strong atop sculpted mounds, framing the old 18th green at the Cape Golf and Racquet Club.



special

The new 18th hole at Masonboro Country Club, formerly known as The Cape Golf & Racquet Club, is progressing well. The course and clubhouse are among major renovations to be unveiled next year at the southern New Hanover County golf community.

Native sandy areas border fairways sprigged with 419 bermudagrass. Heavy machinery buzzes in the background as workers lay drainage pipe, unroll sod, carve bunkers and reconfigure greens, transforming this piece of property into a new course that those involved expect will be something special.

Dark dank thickets have been cleared, beds of pine straw now rest in their place. Since January, crews have demolished and refurbished this piece of property in southern New Hanover County.

The old clubhouse, tennis courts and swimming pool are gone, construction on replacements will begin soon. Bridges and bulkheads have been added. Nearly two-thirds of the holes on the golf course are shaped and pure, white sand – just like that used at Augusta National – is already in some bunkers.

Southern Destiny LLC owns the property and plans to open the new course late in 2009 as Masonboro Country Club, an upscale, non-equity private club.

Shapemasters, a Southport-based golf course construction company, is carrying out the plans of architect Bob Moore, of JMP Golf Design.

Shapemasters also handled

recent renovations at Porters Neck and Landfall's Dye Course. Company president Jeffrey Stein said this project is unique because of the significant elevation changes on the property, uncharacteristic of a plot so close to the coast.

Moore counts North Shore in Sneads Ferry and the North River Club in Beaufort among his dozens of designs. While the routing of the new Masonboro CC will be similar to that of the old Cape, nothing else looks familiar.

"What this screamed for was a

total renovation, almost a start over," Moore said.

One of the strongest challenges Moore faced was working around existing areas of water, which are now considered wetlands and must remain in place.

"There were elements with respect to water that were improperly located or created. What we have to do is adapt our design from a standpoint of playability and strategic value," he said.

The new course will measure more than 7,000 yards and feature five sets of tees. There will be a 10-acre driving range, complete with covered hitting areas and short game practice facility near the old first fairway.

MiniVerde, a finer Bermuda grass, has been planted on the greens. It is becoming popular in the Southern U.S. because it is easier to maintain than bentgrass – especially during summer months – yet can be mown closely enough to provide speedy putting surfaces. East Lake in Atlanta, site of this week's Tour Championship, and TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., also have MiniVerde greens.

"From June to September you have to baby bentgrass in high heat, high humidity areas," Moore said. "You're having to use a lot of chemicals just to nurse it through, and so what happens are those three months during the summer when you get your heaviest play, your greens are in the worst condition of the year."

Moore is particularly pleased with the new bunkering. On the old Cape course, many fairways were ill-defined, hidden from the tee or simply faded into the rough, trees and hazards. By elevating tees and building steep bunker faces, Moore feels he's designed a course that will please the eye and also challenge.

"It's going to be a first-class facility. Everything has been done the right way."

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GCSAA Blog

[Everything Is Peachy in Atlanta](#)

I peeked my head in Ralph Kepple's office about two hours ago, not sure what to expect. Last year at this time he was -- to coin a phrase -- "lower than a rattlesnake in a wagon wheel rut." Unseasonable heat in Atlanta had baked East Lake Country Club's bentgrass greens. Kepple wasn't alone in his struggles. Not since Sherman made his march through Georgia had there been as much carnage. Golf courses were suffering. But none were hosting a Tour Championship and none were in the spotlight like East Lake was.

I encountered a disgruntled Kepple upon my arrival this year. But this time his concern wasn't fried greens, rather a fried laptop computer. "I have sent this thing away once before and it still doesn't work," Kepple says good naturedly. He has plenty of reason to smile. East Lake has received rave reviews after a renovation to MiniVerde bermudagrass greens was completed earlier this summer. "The feedback has been great," Kepple says. "The players, the club and the Tour understood why the conditions were what they were last year. Bentgrass can't survive in that heat. This year will be different."

Kepple closes his laptop with a shrug and smiles. He knows his week will get only better.

Posted by Jeff Bollig on September 24, 2008 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#)

Club and Resort Business.com

Ralph Kepple Reopens East Lake Golf Club for The Tour Championship

by C&RB Staff (editor@clubandresortbusiness.com)
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GCSAA Certified Golf Course Superintendent Ralph Kepple has reopened East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta for The Tour Championship presented by Coca-Cola, September 25-28. A year-long renovation that began immediately after last year's event replaced the club's bentgrass greens with MiniVerde bermudagrass.

In addition to the greens renovation, other projects included: pushing back the green on No. 7 by 43 yards and reconfiguring it; moving the fairway and green on No. 17 to the left, to be closer to East Lake's shoreline; adding new tees on No. 13 and 15; and

expanding the back tee on No. 6, so it could be used for all four rounds.

Additionally, new fairway bunkers were added on the left side of holes No. 3, 7 and 16, and to the right side of No. 15. Bunkers were reconfigured on the green at No. 16 and expanded on the right side of the green on No. 14, as well as the left side of No. 4 green. New hole locations were created on various greens and low-cut, roll-off areas were installed off the greens on holes No. 2, 3, 7, 8 and 10. For the Tour Championship, the golf course will be a par-70 layout of 7,300 yards.

Rees Jones served as architect for the renovation.

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East Lake - playing firm and fast this year.

INSIDE TRACK: TOUR CHAMPIONSHIP

By Harry Emanuel

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East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta Georgia hosts the Tour Championship presented by Coca-Cola for the eighth year.

The Tour Championship is the final tournament of the FedEx Cup. Vijay Singh may have already secured the \$10,000,000 first prize but the 30 players in the field will still be fighting for a share of this week's \$7,000,000 prize fund.

East Lake Golf Club has a rich history as the oldest golf course in Atlanta and was Bobby Jones' home course. It is an old-style tree-lined golf course with multiple undulation changes, narrow fairways and large contoured greens that slope from back to front.

The drought in Atlanta last year resulted in the greens becoming stressed and almost unplayable. Rees Jones who redesigned the course in 1994 was once again called in to help re-lay the greens and make some competitive enhancements.

The seventh green has been moved nearly 40 yards and a fairway bunker has been added on the left hand side of the landing area. This uphill par four now plays 434 yards.

There are new tees on the thirteenth and fifteenth holes which both play uphill. The thirteenth is now 476 yards but will play more like 500. Thirty yards have been added to the short par five fifteenth so the players will be forced to hit longer irons in to the green.

The biggest change has been to the par four seventeenth. It still plays 453 yards but the fairway and green have been moved twenty yards closer to the water, which is now in play.

The greens were re-laid with MiniVerde, an ultradwarf Bermuda grass which provides an excellent putting surface and early reports from the players are that these are some of the best greens they have seen on tour this year.

Rees Jones recontoured a few greens and added more run off areas around the greens similar to Pinehurst which puts a greater emphasis on accurate iron play.

All new greens take a time to bed in and this year they will be very hard.

Todd Rhinehart, the Tournament Director, believes: "Approach shots will take a hard first bounce of around twenty feet."

The greens will be hard and fast and are set to run between 11.5 and 12 on the stimp meter. The forecast is for sun and wind with a little rain on Friday so they should maintain their speed throughout the tournament.

The Bermuda rough has been cropped to two and half inches in length. It is not as long as it has been in the past and players will be able to advance the ball towards the green but the ball sits right down so they will lose an element of control.

Shorter rough does not mean this is a golf course that can be overpowered and the ability to shape the ball off the tee is imperative.

First-time visitor Dudley Hart said: "There's a lot of tee shots you have to shape your ball different directions. Doglegs left to right, doglegs right to left, the fairways tilting where you need to curve it a little bit into fairways to keep it from running up out of one side.

"There's a really nice variety of shots out there."

The course will play firm and fast and will not be the soft defenceless course we saw last year. Players will need to plot their way around the golf course and at times bounce the ball up onto the greens and not simply hit the ball high and land it softly by the pins.

Below are the hole averages from the previous seven Tour Championships held at East Lake.

Hole	Yards	Par	Sc Av	Rank
1	424	4	4.010	8
2	214	3	3.026	7
3	387	4	3.880	16
4	440	4	3.998	9
5	520	4	4.191	2
6	168	3	2.960	13
7	434	4	3.930	14
8	405	4	3.966	12
9	600	5	4.687	17
	3,592	35	34.713	
10	469	4	4.179	3
11	187	3	2.978	11
12	391	4	3.909	15
13	476	4	4.091	6
14	442	4	3.983	10
15	525	5	4.397	18
16	481	4	4.232	1

17	453	4	4.095	5
18	235	3	3.149	4
	3,669	35	35.161	
	70	7,261	69.874	

The finishing stretch of holes may have the greatest bearing on the outcome of the tournament.

The sixteenth is a testing par four which ranks as one of the most difficult holes on the course. It has a narrow, difficult to hit fairway and the long heavily guarded green demands an accurate approach shot with a mid iron.

The seventeenth could prove treacherous after the redesign and a few players will find the water.

The eighteenth, a 235 yard par three, often plays into the wind and some of the shorter hitters may even require a three wood to find the putting surface. The two tiered green is surrounded by deep bunkers and there is no bail out area.

When Adam Scott won here in 2006 he was one over for the closing stretch of holes over the four days.

The Journal of Friendswood, Houston

Good Club Selection



Jeremy Merritt, assistant golf pro at Golfcrest Country Club in Pearland, has had no shortage of busy days in preparing for the NGA Hooters Tour event that comes to Golfcrest next week.



By [TED DUNNAM](#)

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At the speed which golf club and golf ball technology are zooming, course architects face a never-ending challenge to keep players from bringing once-formidable courses to their knees.

That's why the folks at Golfcrest Country Club have been thoughtfully and aggressively working the past year to create a layout that will provide a stern test to a 161-player field in the inaugural National Golf Association Hooters Pro Golf Tour in Pearland.

The Texas Honing Open begins Monday with a qualifier, followed by a practice round Tuesday and a pro-am Wednesday. The 72-hole tournament starts Thursday.

Golfcrest pro Mike Colling believes all the pieces are in place to stage a memorable event.

"We re-did all the bunkers, greens, and the surroundings to the greens," Colling said. "We've also done several tee box renovations to make the course longer. We've tried to give these players as big a challenge as we could."

Colling said from the normal tee boxes, Golfcrest plays about 6,700 yards. For the Hooters event, the course has been lengthened to 7,254 yards.

"This is a tight course so I think the winner of this tournament will be the guy who hits the fairways," Colling said. "We stopped mowing the rough and greens last week."

"Based on how much rain we get, the course could be pretty difficult. Two tournaments ago (on the Hooters tour), I think 30-under won it. We're not going to let them do that out here."

Colling said it was conversation among the players that helped bring a Hooters tour stop to Pearland.

"They knew we were doing a renovation here, and the Hooters tour contacted us through the players. They thought (Golfcrest) would be a good place to have the event, and it was actually recommended by the players on the tour."

"We've been working with them since last October or November."

Colling is modestly proud of the new-look course.

"The greens are protected by all the new bunkers," he said. "We actually took a few away, and added 20 bunkers. A lot were re-designed."

"It no longer has the typical, old-course look to it around the greens. The bunkers are a lot deeper, more severe and they are visually appealing from the fairway."

"The green renovation is much like that at Redstone (home of the Houston Open). We've got those same MiniVerde greens replacing the Tif dwarf Bermuda. **The USGA touts these MiniVerde greens as the best putting surface you can have.**"

Colling, who has been the head pro at Golfcrest for eight years, said the pace of the greens will be about 11 to 12 on the stimp-meter. In golf lingo, that means super fast. The MiniVerde greens are a fifth generation of ultra dwarf Bermuda grass.

There are also false fronts on several of the greens that can play mind games with approach shots.

Errant drives will likely result in second shots to be played from a penalizing rough 2-3 inches deep.

"Out here, that's brutal," Colling said. "If you're in the rough, you're probably going to wind up pitching to the green for your third shot. The winner of this tournament will have to have a very good short game."

"This course, without question, is in the best shape it's ever been. We'd love to have a little rain, though, between now and the time the tournament starts."

The longest hole on the course will be No. 10, a 594-yard par-5 while the longest par-4 is the 463-yard No. 6. Colling said he expect the par-3, 232-yard No. 8 hole to play the toughest.

Among the players in the field at the Pearland stop are Brian Watts, who lost a 1998 British Open playoff to Mark O'Meara and Mike Standly, who owns a PGA tour victory in New Orleans.

Fans will be treated to seeing many golfers who will eventually make a name for themselves on the PGA tour. Seventeen former Hooters Tour players competed last week in the British at Royal Birkdale, England.

"I think the Hooters tour slogan is 'your PGA tour players of tomorrow'," Colling said. "These guys are very good. These are guys that just missed qualifying through Q-school and they're right under the Nationwide Tour."

Total purse for the event is \$200,000 with almost \$40,000 going to the winner. Colling said this will be the most

important tournament Golfcrest has hosted.

Prior to the Texas Honing Open, Golfcrest's biggest claim to fame was hosting a senior Heartland Tour event seven years ago won by Ed Fiori.

"We're expecting a great week of golf," Colling said. "Fans will get their first glimpse at some future stars in this game."