

## January 2021 - Did You Know?

### Other Green Renovations: nos. 4, 5, & 17

This month we will wrap up our discussion of green renovations done after Langford & Moreau laid out our course over 90 years ago. In addition to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century renovations of nos. 14 and 16 that we discussed in earlier DYK's, two other greens have been completely remodeled. They are nos. 4 and 5. Interestingly, these two greens were named in my informal survey as having "interest and challenge", right behind nos. 14 and 16. So, for those keeping track, the four greens that you picked as the most interesting and challenging are the four that are *not* original Langford & Moreau.

The fourth green was replaced in 1988. The original green was lower than the current green, with a steep bluegrass bank in the back. There was a long bunker at the bottom of the bank. The green suffered agronomically. The grass was mostly *poa annua*, with very little of the original Washington bent grass remaining. The *poa* on #4 did not take the heat very well. Putting conditions were poor especially in the summer months.

The club started over, raising and recontouring the entire 4<sup>th</sup> green. Jerry Matthews (nephew of W. Bruce Matthews Sr who had done no. 14 green in 1973) was in charge. He was assisted by W. Bruce Matthews III. The new design was in three tiers. The front tier was about two feet higher than the old green, the second level up another foot, and third level about a foot higher than the second. The new green was built on top of the old green, using fill that was available nearby at the maintenance building. The new green was larger than the original one, especially in the back right where there was a lobe. Drainage was added under the green. The back bunker was removed, and the slope of the bank at the back of the green was made less severe. Two new bunkers were added, a large, kidney-shaped one on the left and a smaller one on the front right. The bunkering has changed since 1978 but the green contours have not. Some years later the lobe on the back right was reduced in size by mowing that lobe to fringe height.



1938 aerial, showing original bunkering of nos. 4 and 5

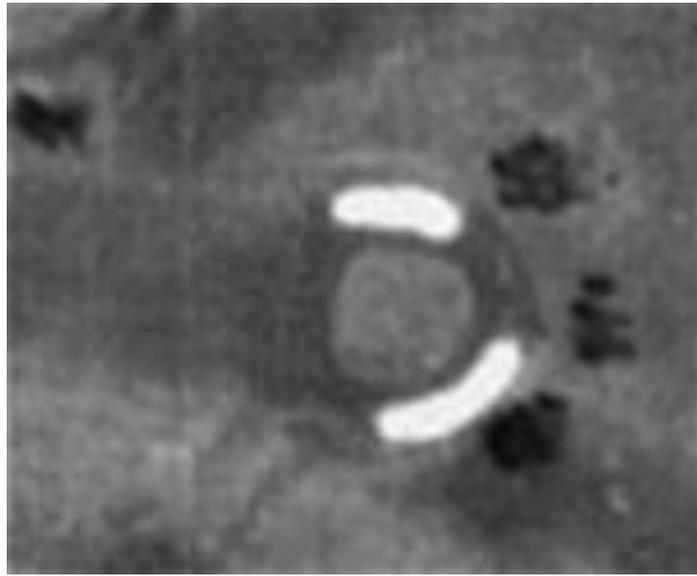
Ten years after this project on no. 4 the club decided to renovate the 5<sup>th</sup> green. There was no agronomic problem with this green; it was just so flat that it had little putting interest. Back then it was probably our flattest green. The only movement was in the back right, where the green sloped toward the edge of the green a little. For a relatively short par 3, there wasn't much to commend this original green.

The renovation process started in the fall of 1998. Bruce Matthews III was the architect for the project, and Turf Green was hired for construction. The crew stripped the grass from the green, rolled it up and set it aside. A small amount of 80/20 mix of sand and peat was used to provide some contours on the green. The sod was then pieced back onto the recontoured area, and the green was top-dressed aggressively to get it to heal. Unlike the project on #4, there was no drainage added.

It took part of the next season for the new green to become smooth, but by mid-season of 1999 the renovation was considered a success. The new green had a lot more interest. There is a small area in the left front that has a dicey hole location. Also, a putt from the front of the green to the back right became very challenging, since the line of that putt goes first uphill and then slopes away, so that gauging the correct speed is much more difficult.

A final note on green renovation: You may recall that my DYK from last August stated that five of our greens have been renovated. I included no. 17 because its perimeter was significantly changed. But unlike nos. 4, 5, 14 and 16, the putting surface itself has not been altered. Rather, it was just reduced in size, mostly on the left front.

The three photo closeups below show the difference. The green was originally oval in shape. To give the hole more interest, two cross bunkers were added in the 1970's, but the round shape was not altered. Then in a later bunker renovation, the old bunkers were completely redone in a different configuration. This is when the size of the green was reduced. Two new bunkers were added at the left front. They were placed in part where there previously was putting green, significantly reducing the size of the green on the left front. There was also a new bunker in the back left, and a severe mound on the back right. Our most recent renovation, completed last fall, will change the look of bunkers around #17 green again, but with the green itself not changed except for the small recapture of lost edges.



1938 photo  
(see Note 1)



1978 photo  
(see Note 2)



**1994 photo  
(see Note 3)**

**Note 1:** The earliest aerial we have of the course was taken in 1938. The bunkers at that time are believed to be the same as they were in 1929, when the course opened.

**Note 2:** This 1978 photo shows the bunkering on no. 17 that was later created to toughen up the approach to the 17<sup>th</sup> green, requiring a forced carry. This was probably done in the late 1970's. The little patch of fairway between the two front bunkers was called – get this – “the ladies’ aid.” My guess is that some high handicap guys also used it.

**Note 3:** This 1994 photo shows the reduced green size and the bunkering on no. 17 that was done in the 1980's. This bunker configuration remained this way until our 2020 renovation.

If anyone is interested, there are aerial photographs of our course from various dates over the years. I was able to find some of these in the Kent County property records, and some from the MSU archives.

*Brent Rector*

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