

November 2020 - Did You Know? The History of #14 Green

This month's DYK will follow up a bit on our greens. As earlier reported, #14 green is our "most interesting and challenging to putt", based on my recent informal survey of members.

Let's explore the history of our #14 green. Our current green is not the original green that was built by Langford & Moreau. It was completely renovated in 1973. The new green is in the same place as the original L&M. The original green was lower, at the same elevation as the fairway just in front of it. And it was fairly flat like the rest of our original greens. There were no bunkers.

Here's a photo of #14, taken in 1961 from just past the dogleg in the fairway. Although the image is not very sharp, you can see that the green was about level with the fairway.



This original green suffered from flooding and was frequently wet.[\[1\]](#) The turf quality was poor, because of poor air flow and wetness. This condition lasted for over 40 years until the decision was made to start over.

In 1973 our #14 green was replaced, with architectural assistance by W. Bruce Matthews, Sr. He was a golf course architect from West Michigan. As a young college graduate in the 1920's, his goal was to become a golf course architect. Unfortunately, the

depression forced him to change his plans. He became the general manager and superintendent of Green Ridge CC, which was in Comstock Park.^[i] Matthews eventually did go into golf course architecture business, part-time at first. Beginning in 1959 he did this full-time.^[ii] He designed and renovated several courses in the last half of the 20th century, mostly in West Michigan.

Blythefield hired Matthews to fix the agronomic problems of our original #14 green. What he produced is arguably the best of our 18 greens. The green site was raised by pushing up the surrounds. Parts of these lower areas became bunkers (but I'm not sure whether the bunkers were added in the 1973 renovation or done later). Except for the false front that is cut to fairway height, the rest of the surrounding banks have bluegrass slopes. The green itself has a fair amount of contour going this way and that, creating many interesting hole locations. (When Tom Doak was at our course in the early 1990's, he remarked "Wow!" when he saw the slope and shape of #14 green.)

The 1973 construction work was done by our own grounds crew. Tony Tredente was our golf course superintendent then. He recalls getting instructions from Matthews on how the green should be shaped. Tony's crew tried to follow his instructions but apparently failed. When Matthews saw how the crew had shaped it, he was not satisfied. So, the crew started over with Matthews supervising the work onsite, getting the contours the way that he wanted. The result is the green we now have.

A newer type of grass, Toronto bent, was used for this green. Matthews recommended it. There wasn't seed available, so Toronto bent stolens were spread and rolled on the green. ^[i]

The green created in 1973 has borne the test of time. In voting #14 green as our most interesting and challenging green, some of you added an explanation for your choice.

- Jose Hernandez: "[O]ur par 5, 14th hole is the toughest. It seems no matter where the pin is, I have a challenge just two putting that green."
- Deb Kohn: "14 is always the most challenging for me, but it is also fun to try to figure out the correct line for the putt."
- Kim Gary: "If it is to left behind bunker, tuff to get at with longer shot, so you go to middle then faced with a down/side hill put. Also if short front, putting off green is possible, or if just in front, putting up only to have it roll back."
- Steve Gulis: "My vote is for #14. No easy putt anywhere on that green."
- Scott Keane: "#14. It's interesting and difficult and sometimes very difficult depending on Collin's mood."
- Pam Gary: "As far as the challenging green question, my opinion would be #14 or 16 depending on where the pin placement would be."

May each of us have many more years of being challenged by #14 green.

Brent Rector

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[i] This history would not have been possible without the input of three individuals who were around back then: Tony Tredente and Roger Barton (two former BCC grounds superintendents) and W. Bruce Matthews III, grandson of the W. Bruce Matthews, Sr.

[ii] The fairway on #14 also suffered from wetness. In 1976 the the fairway from the dogleg to the green was also raised and new drainage added.

[iii] Many years later the Green Ridge course later was sold to developers. The Green Ridge members built a new club, Egypt Valley CC.

[iv] For biographical information about Bruce Matthews Sr., see <https://www.golfadvisor.com/architects/424-bruce-matthews/> and <https://www.golfcourseranking.com/architect-profile/list-of-courses-designed/bruce-matthews/2142/www.golfcourseranking.com>

[v] This experiment was apparently successful, as evidenced by our use of Toronto bent the next year on a few other greens.