

THE REBIRTH OF LAMBTON

Playability and agronomy are at the heart of a stunning renovation

Lambton Golf Club's roots run deep. The Toronto club—whose design has been shaped over the years by noted architects such as Donald Ross, Stanley Thompson and Tom Bendelow—dates back to 1902 and played host to several Canadian Opens between 1907 and 1941, the last of which was won by the late Sam Snead. The last time golf was an Olympic sport, in 1904, Lambton's George S. Lyon won gold for Canada. Two of golf's immortals, Ted Ray and Harry Vardon, played an exhibition here in 1913 during their North American tour.

Time marched on, and as it did, age continued to prey on the city course. And then a unique opportunity presented itself. With a reservoir/irrigation project on the table, a series of agronomic issues impeding conditioning values and the club wishing to address both architectural deficiencies and liability issues of errant play along neighbouring Scarlett Road), a series of decisions were made.



Peter Kinch gets to the root of the matter.

PHOTO: BRENT LONG

Those involved need to develop a clear and consistent vision and push ego aside so that aggressive timelines can be met.

Following the receipt of proposals for the reservoir project and a cost analysis, the board of directors and club management began looking for ways to get more value for their money, and a key question fuelled a change in mindset: "If we are digging a reservoir, can't we make use of all that material to address some of the issues on the golf course, instead of paying someone to truck it all away?"

Enter famed American golf architect Rees Jones, who, in collaboration with design associate Keith Evans, put together a vision that would not only see the proposed reservoir completed but the entire golf course reborn. The results, quite frankly, are fabulous.

Agronomically, Lambton's infra-



JOHN BLADON runs his own management, communications and consulting firm and works globally as an agronomist for Agrium Advanced Technologies.

structure has also been visibly strengthened. “Within the plan, we simply had to have a focus on the agronomic components (if we were) to improve on the previous limitations the golf course had from a conditioning standpoint,” golf superintendent Peter Kinch explains.

Simply put, 100-year-old golf courses were never built to support today’s conditioning values and the game’s technological evolution. That’s why a strategic renovation like this one made so much sense. Gone are Lambton’s miniscule bent/poa tee boxes that were unable to support annual traffic and play. They have been replaced with pure bentgrass tees with twice the square footage in new and unique locations to offer a varied playing experience regardless of handicap.

Gone are the over-shaded, smallish and poorly drained bent/poa greens that were previously prone to annual winter-kill. In their place are enlarged putting surfaces—strategically placed for improved air circulation and to gather morning sunlight—with gentle slopes and a bumper crop of deeply rooted and winter-hardy hybrid A1/A4 creeping bentgrass.

Blind shots have been replaced by open vistas and targets in plain sight. And tired bunker complexes have been rejuvenated by well-situated-

hazards with soft and subtle lines that beautifully complement the property.

The birthing of a project like this is a labour of love with a host of folks involved—people who need to develop a clear and consistent vision and push ego aside so that aggressive timelines can be met. Of note, it will have been scarcely a year from the start of construction to the August 6th unveiling of the “new” Lambton. That’s a testament to Kinch, assistant Chris Thompson and the entire maintenance team. Concepts, ideas, designs and planning are the obvious foundation of a project like this one, but it’s the golf superintendent’s responsibility to breathe life into it.

It is clear that the Lambton club is passionate about what has been accomplished and feels empowered about its future; the new members beating on the door are proof of this. From the president to the board and all the way through the club’s management and members, there’s a definitive buzz about the place. “It truly is and has been a team effort and something that everyone affiliated with the project can be proud of,” Kinch observes.

Its seeds re-sown and its roots finding new depths, Lambton appears perfectly positioned to make yet another 100 years of history. **OG**