

Redesigned Korea venue makes tour debut

Photo: Getty Images/Han Myung-Gu

Rees Jones has completed his first project in South Korea, the renovation of Asiad Country Club in Busan in preparation for the BMW Ladies Championship on the LPGA Tour, which took place in October 2019.

The 27-hole facility has been renamed LPGA International Busan and becomes the association's second accredited facility. The first, at its headquarters in Daytona Beach, Florida, also has a Rees Jones layout.

The brief from the Busan club was to update and improve the overall golf experience of the Pine, Valley and Lake nines, creating a classic and cleaner golf course look. Jones and design associate Bryce Swanson undertook a comprehensive review of the course, focused on enhancing the strategy and character of each hole. Jones said the aim was to "improve playability for golfers of all skill levels and provide a complete challenge for the talented LPGA professional players."

Fairway and greenside bunkers were rebuilt and the locations adjusted to create variety and challenge. Landscape and waste bunkers were removed to improve playability for members.

Some green complexes were reshaped with new chipping areas to give players additional recovery shot options. Green surfaces on the Lake's ninth and Pine's eighth holes were rebuilt to improve playability and increase the number of hole locations. The long par-four fifth on the Valley nine was completely rebuilt and reshaped, to give players more approach options.

"It'll be different," said Jones, to *Korea JoongAng Daily*, when asked

The new LPGA International Busan course was reworked by Rees Jones in time for the BMW Ladies Championship



The par-three sixth hole on the Valley nine plays to an island green

before the championship about what players should expect. “They’re going to like it a lot more because we’ve taken a lot of areas out that were over-penalising. We’ve really tucked some bunkers in places that are going to make them think. It’s going to be strategic and it’s got a lot of room off the tee, which means they can take out their driver. The greens can change on any given day. The first year, they’ll learn it. Next year, they’ll know it better. They’ll love this golf course.”

“On this site the vegetation is good, the topography is very different. It’s quite natural so you don’t have to over-shape things.”

At the official opening in September 2019, LPGA commissioner Mike Whan said: “I’m very impressed that LPGA International Busan is a completely different course from when I visited the venue in March last year.”

The tournament was won by Korean

golfer Ha Na Jang, who defeated Danielle Kang from the USA after three play-off holes, having both completed the regulation four rounds in 19 under par.

Fellow competitor Sei Young Kim said: “Strategically, it made me think a lot about each and every shot and

“We don’t work from the championship down, we work from the everyday up”

forced me to use every club in my bag. While very difficult, I had a lot of fun figuring out this golf course. It is definitely my kind of golf course.

“The fifteenth hole was the most memorable for me. Although it gave me an opportunity to get in on the green in two playing into the wind, it presented significant risk because of the hazards on both sides. It was fun to

play this hole because of that very ‘risk and reward’ nature.”

Jones said that to everyday golfers, LPGA International Busan will feel like a brand-new course. “When we design any golf course, we’re really designing it for the everyday player,” he said. “We’re doing the rework for everybody

who plays there 365 days a year. Then we adapt it to a PGA or LPGA. We don’t work from the championship down, we work from the everyday up.”

Jones said that the project met the goals of both the LPGA and the city of Busan and was “a complete success”. As a result, the club has been able to increase entry fees and membership is now full, with a waiting list.