

The approach area and green complex at the fourteenth have been changed to give players multiple ways to tackle the par-five hole



Jones prioritises playability at The Preserve

Rees Jones and his design associate Bryce Swanson have completed a renovation of the golf course at The Preserve at Ironhorse in West Palm Beach, Florida.

Green complexes and bunkers have been redesigned and rebuilt, to give the course a stronger visual identity and improve playability, while also addressing issues with agronomy.

“The turf was at the end of its lifecycle,” said Jones. “The construction of greens was very different in the late 1980s when it was built. In some places where we dug down we found some very dark material – the superintendent Jay Pacholczak finally found out why he was having such a hard time growing grass!”

The original development of the course for ‘button king’ Alan Sher is documented in John Strawn’s excellent book *Driving the Green*, which also details the roles of the original golf course architect Arthur Hills and his associate Mike Dasher in the complex process of getting their design built.

Key among those complexities is the course’s proximity to the Grassy Waters Preserve, 24 square miles of wetlands that are the primary water supply for West Palm Beach and the surrounding towns.

Several holes play alongside a natural buffer between the course and the preserve so the design team has taken care to reduce encroachment into those areas. On the par-four tenth for

example, the green has been moved forward to make space for a natural waste area, one of several ‘saving’ hazards throughout the course. “A lot of bunkers around the greens are to keep the ball from going into the natural areas,” said Jones. “People sometimes misconstrue what sand areas are about: they can also act as a protective feature, rather than just a penal one.”

Oil executive Thomas O’Malley, who bought The Preserve in 2010, sought a more classic, enjoyable golf experience, where each hole offers a different challenge. Jones and Swanson have altered the contouring and angles of greens, opened entrances and, in places, set them back further from water.



“Members are ecstatic about how it plays: it feels different every day, is not overly penal and is very thought provoking,” said Jones.

“They’re saying it’s a fairer test, too,” added Swanson. “They’re not getting the hard rub that was there before. Some of the greens had too much slope or were difficult to hold.”

“I think we really corrected that situation,” said Jones.

The front nine has consecutive par fives, the fifth and sixth, that play to a similar length and in the same direction. New fairway bunkering gives the holes strong individual character, and the reveal of the sixth green alongside a pond has been heightened by opening up the view of the water. The putting surface has been tilted towards the player

and a new bailout area created to the left, making shots to the green less penal.

Jones highlights another par-five, the fourteenth, as an example of how their work has created more playing options. Two bunkers directly in front of the green have been removed to open up the entrance to the green, with new hazards in the approach area cutting into the fairway and giving the player various routes to the green.

“I think the par threes are very interesting too,” says Swanson. “They vary greatly in terms of length from the short third to the long thirteenth, that plays alongside water. It was nearly impossible before and we’ve been complemented on making it challenging, but manageable.”

The par-four eighth has a new fairway bunker, and the green has been lowered and rebunkered

