



5th green at Cutten Fields is being established behind the old green. Features of the new green include a 41% increase in size; you can see how we utilized the cart path to increase entrance and exit points in comparison to the old path on the left. The old path and green have since been removed. Photo taken by David Braun.

THE PURSUIT OF CUTTEN FIELDS' FUTURE Preserving Our Past

Written by and photos provided by Bill Green, Golf Course & Grounds Superintendent, Cutten Fields.

Golf course renovations often stem from a desire for improvement that is initiated by a combination of a passionate membership, club management, and other key stakeholders. Behind every renovation is a unique story to be told; there have been few renovations that have come together as uniquely as that of Cutten Fields.

HISTORY

Cutten Fields was designed by amateur golfer Chick Evans, who was

the first golfer to win the US Open and US amateur in the same year. Canadian Architect Stanley Thompson also contributed to the original design; however, it is believed his involvement came later in the process. Since the club's opening in 1931, the course had undergone numerous changes over the past 92 years including the sale of a portion of the back 9, the addition of mounding around green sites, and numerous bunker renovations to bring bunkers closer to shrinking greens. The original design along with many of the unique features had been lost or altered as time passed. It was time to look at reinvigorating the golf course while restoring some of the features that made Cutten Fields distinct from other great Canadian golf courses. The search began for an architect that could revitalize Cutten Fields.



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A cross-section of POLYON® 41-0-0 prill with polymer coating adhered to urea substrate



Jeff Mingay restored some symmetrical features at Cutten Fields including this rectangle green on the 18th hole. Jeff utilized the preliminary plan and old photos to replicate the original green shape.

THE PROCESS

As part of the selection process of the architect, the Golf Course and Grounds Committee established and prioritized various club objectives. This process proved to be a valuable exercise to keep the design and methods in sync with our objectives because sometimes clubs can get lost in the process and excitement of it all. The following objectives were approved by the committee and were incorporated as part of the improvement plan:

- 1 Maintain the spirit of Chick Evans and Stanley Thompson.** If, as set out in the club's Guiding Principles, we are to be true to the spirit of Stanley Thompson, we should recognize that time has diminished the presence of the Thompson spirit. We now have an opportunity and perhaps a responsibility to "move the course forward by taking it back to its roots."
- 2 Respond to technological advances of the modern game.** These advances have resulted in the course losing some of its original design defenses, such as bunker positioning and fairway shapes and contours.
- 3 Attend to safety concerns.** Address the safety concerns of golfers, staff, and neighbouring properties.
- 4 Advance agronomic conditioning and consistency.** Limit and reduce risk of winter damage and summer stress by increasing green sizes, increase pinnable areas, improve surface and subsurface drainage, improve traffic flow on greens, and promote hearty turf varieties.
- 5 Financial benefits.** Reduction of financial inputs should be considered when creating any new design features.
- 6 Environment benefits.** A more natural course will be more environmentally friendly and will likely reduce the amount of water and chemical use.
- 7 Competitive positioning of Cutten Fields.** The club's value is determined through the myriad of intangibles – obviously the golf course is our key tangible asset. A comprehensive master plan must provide us an opportunity to significantly enhance the golf course and thereby differentiate the Cutten Fields golf experience in a competitive golf market.

After a lengthy selection process that included an RFP (request for proposal) process and multiple interviews, Jeff Mingay was appointed course architect in 2016. The Golf Course Improvement Plan was developed in 2018, however the club was still investigating the best solution to improve the greens and mitigate the constant threat of winter injury.

A DEEPER LOOK INTO ISSUES – GREEN SITE EVALUATIONS

Agronomically, the golf course was falling short on member expectations as the putting greens could not perform consistently with the constant threat of winter injury on predominately undersized *Poa annua* greens. A comprehensive green site evaluation was completed to help direct the club on how the greens could be improved. It quickly became evident that the club had too many deficiencies to simply add drainage or expand greens to solve the myriad of problems. The common deficiencies included inadequate sunlight, limited entry/exit points, poor surface drainage on the greens themselves and many of the green surrounds had mounding and slopes that were draining onto greens, absence of internal

drainage, inadequate square footage, and a lack of pin locations due to severe slopes.

Ultimately this process provided what we would use as the guiding principles to the development of new greens at Cutten Fields, as part of the Golf Course Improvement Plan. Looking ahead 30 years down the road, we wanted a future greens site evaluation to hit positively on as many categories that were in our control. If we could achieve that goal, the greens at Cutten Fields would be set up for many years of success. Additionally, if the club was to take on the financial burden and effort to build new greens, why fall short on any controllable factor like green sizes or entry/exit points.

COURSE DESIGNED BY CHARLES EVANS JR. CHICAGO.
REVAMPED & DEPICTED BY STANLEY THOMPSON & CO., LTD.
TORONTO, CANADA — ROCHESTER, U.S.A.

The photo above was cropped from a preliminary plan. This certainly adds a layer of mystique and curiosity into how and when exactly Stanley Thompson became involved in the design process. The preliminary plan contains existing bunkers and proposed bunkers. Despite the unique architectural history, Cutten Fields will always be known as the "home of Stanley Thompson" as he once owned and managed the club.

THE GREEN-SITE GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- 1. Sunlight:** Maximize both morning and afternoon sunlight. This included tree removal and relocating greens where required.
- 2. Air Movement:** Maximize air movement where possible by removing trees or underbrush.
- 3. Entrance and Exit points:** Three or more entry and exit points per green.
- 4. Green Size:** Minimum 6200 ft.²
- 5. Pinnable Area:** 4200 ft² of pinnable area at 1.5% to 3.5% slope.
- 6. Surface Drainage:** Multi-directional surface drainage off putting green surfaces.
- 7. Internal Drainage:** 10-foot centres.
- 8. Purity of Stand:** 007 Creeping Bentgrass.

Unfortunately, we could not successfully address all of these principles on every hole. In those circumstances, the architect simply compensated by increasing the green size and/or sloping the surface of the green to face south to maximize exposure to light

GOLF COURSE IMPROVEMENT PLAN - IMPLEMENTATION

In the spring of 2019, the club experienced yet another bad winter and this set the stage for the addition of 18 new greens to the Golf Course Improvement Plan. Preparation began for a member vote to take place in the fall of 2019. A communication plan was developed with long-time Cutten Fields member Joan McVean, who had a wealth of knowledge and experience in communications with the local school board. The club conducted focus groups to help determine the best way to approach the project with respect to disruption **ONLY**, and not soliciting them for input on the necessity of the improvement plan. We offered walking tours to members to observe and discuss historically troubled greens. For comparison, the tours also included viewing the new pure bentgrass greens at the Guelph Turfgrass Institute. The most successful walking tour was on Men's Night, where we provided refreshments and a putting competition after a short presentation. Also, the club hosted multiple townhall meetings, which included presentations from Dave Oatis (Consulting Agronomist), Bill Green, and/or the charismatic Jeff Mingay. Communication and education were critical in achieving a 95% vote in favour of the Golf Course Improvement Plan.

The original Golf Course Improvement Plan was approved on the premise that Cutten Fields staff would complete 5 holes in-house. These were holes where we could build the new green behind or beside the current green so golfers could essentially keep playing with minor inconveniences. Initially, a contractor was scheduled to finish the remaining 13 holes, with the condition that we would utilize temporary greens and keep the course open for play as much as possible. When covid hit, there was so much uncertainty that the club decided to put a hold on the contractor portion of the project, but work continued on the other five holes. During this time, Pro Shop and clubhouse staff assisted with construction on the golf course.

Once covid restrictions subsided and things got rolling again, the club was ready to complete the final 13 greens, but major changes were on the horizon. Over the course of completing the first five greens, we had essentially trained a construction crew who could install drainage, irrigation, and build bunkers, tees, and cart paths. Confidence in executing this project completely in-house quickly grew within our management team, staff, and the membership; sure enough, the talented team at Cutten Fields, along with Jeff Mingay, executed this unimaginable task – in-house – all while keeping the course open and playable.



Golf Course Architect Jeff Mingay looking down the 13th hole at Cutten Fields with superintendent Bill Green and Assistant Superintendent Mark Hughes as they plan their next move.

THE IMMENSE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT INCLUDED

- Relocating two holes to address safety concerns
- Construction of 18 modified California putting greens
- Tee deck renovations that focused on improving separation between decks, more forward tees, and adding length where possible (Cutten Fields is now over 7000 yds)
- Construction of 67 new bunkers
- New cart path systems to improve entry and exit points
- All related irrigation works.

This project could not be completed in-house without a very talented group of individuals. Mark Hughes, who had recently joined our team at Cutten Fields, had 18 years of experience as a project manager for a golf course construction company. Mark travelled throughout the US and Canada renovating and building golf courses. This was certainly a different situation for Mark, being on this side of a major project, as he was able to contribute in a meaningful way throughout the process. Longtime Assistant Superintendent Jamie Laird designed and installed the related irrigation, which was another skill set that was critical to executing the project the way it was done. Jeff Mingay

 GREENS SIZE COMPARISON			
HOLE	OLD GREENS	NEW ERA	% INCREASE
No. 1	5620	7329	30.4
No. 2	4546	7121	56.6
No. 3	7168	7576	5.7
No. 4	5096	9320	82.9
No. 5	4739	6720	41.8
No. 6	4242	6699	57.9
No. 7	4510	6722	49.0
No. 8	4778	8029	68.0
No. 9	4728	7503	58.7
No. 10	3854	6271	62.7
No. 11	4350	7012	61.2
No. 12	4324	7660	77.2
No. 13	5514	6937	25.8
No. 14	5504	7077	28.6
No. 15	4092	9469	131.4
No. 16	3814	6938	81.9
No. 17	5372	7627	42.0
No. 18	4881	6932	42.0
Avg	4841	7386	52.6

subsequently had more architectural freedom, as we were easily able to adjust on the fly without having to worry about change orders, adding costs, or administrative delays. This unique circumstance led to an exceptional end result.

The team at Cutten Fields are looking forward to focusing on turf health and playability this upcoming season. The membership at Cutten Fields put a lot of trust in Jeff Mingay's design and the in-house construction process. It is now time for them to enjoy their newly renovated golf course. ■