



Mount Prospect Golf Club Reboots for the Next Generation of Golfers

Esler Renovation Earns High Praise

By Todd Mrowice

Photos: Nile Young

Our great city and surrounding suburbs are filled with rich tradition when it comes to the game of golf. Many legends have passed through, leaving behind memories that are forever part of Chicagoland's golf landscape. There are certain courses that have roots that run as deep as the history of the game in our country; however, contemporary expectations often require literal bulldozers to those preserve those roots. It's part of keeping up with a game that is forever evolving.

Mt. Prospect Golf Club has been a part of the local golf scene since 1926, when it was originally named Northwest Hills Country Club. The course opened as a nine-hole layout, nine more holes were added in 1927, and the original clubhouse was finished in 1930. So for nearly a century the course has been withstanding the test of time. Over those years, Mt. Prospect Golf Club has gained a cult following, especially within the neighborhood in which the course resides. To say that the course and 19th hole have "regulars" would be a severe understatement.

When the Mount Prospect Park District recently commissioned Esler Golf Design for a complete makeover, it did so knowing that Dave Esler and his team would be renovating a course that had not had its greens, bunkers, or fairways changed in their 90 years of existence. Esler, whose renovation work can be found locally at Chicago Golf Club and Shoreacres Country Club, brought a vision of challenging plateau greens, deep bunkers, and elements of British links-style golf holes.

When the course re-opened on August 1, it was instantly recognized that the \$7.1 million overhaul changed what the golf community knew as Mt. Prospect Golf Club. A somewhat simplistic layout with not too many twists and turns has been replaced with a challenging course accented with false-front greens, deep bunkers, and some of the most menacing green complexes this side of Lake Michigan.

When I finished my first round on the renovated layout, the main thing I took away was a resounding feeling of completeness. I imagined all parties involved with the renovation sat



down with a list of 500 or so items that might need to be addressed with check boxes next to them, and they just went ahead and checked them all.

Every green was resodded with the latest A-type hybrid bent grass. The top-down project also includes a new irrigation system, new bunkers, storm-water retention system, rebuilt tee boxes and fairways, new practice facilities, and much more. It's safe to say Mt. Prospect got everything on its Christmas list this year.

“Chicagoans have such a high architectural IQ, I want to see that extend into golf and hope it will be fun for folks to dissect the allusions and architectural references,” said Dave Esler. “Some are pretty obvious, some slightly obscure.”

Quite possibly the biggest difference to patrons will be the re-routing of holes. The first four holes on the back nine were altered to make way for the new par-3 10th hole (135 yards), the par-4 11th hole (435 yards), and the par-3 12th hole (180 yards). The back nine concludes with holes 14 through 17 on the same routing as the original layout, but the 18th hole did change direction slightly. The purpose of the big change on the back nine was to create a better finish to your round and allow for the new driving range and short game area next to the clubhouse. Alternations didn't end on the course either, as Mt. Prospect Golf Club now offers practice facilities comparable to the best in the area. The shiny new range has 25 stations and rolls out over 300 yards, all on bentgrass turf. The old 12th green is now that short game area complete with practice bunkers and a practice green—all designed to mirror what you'll see on the course. Director of Golf Brett Barcel has had a front row seat to the renovation and is proud of the job that has been accomplished.

“A lot of area courses have been renovated, but few have been specifically designed to capture their original design concepts, or have been created in classic design,” said Barcel. “The style of the course is unique in a market where courses are a lot alike in terms of the modern design architecture. If most courses are a Target or a Walmart, we are more of a boutique.”

As previously mentioned, the new greens are menacing. I'd categorize them as fun, severely undulating, challenging, and rewarding. But that's not all. When “Joe Golfer” who's never seen the course, let alone the renovation, takes a look at the scorecard and finds that the tips cover only 6,305 yards, it's understandable why you'd conclude it's going to be an easy day. Not so fast though. Dave Esler made sure to make you earn a decent score with the flat stick. Hit the par-5 15th hole in two did you? Congrats and best of luck not three putting. That could be said for any of the newly designed greens though, especially if you find yourself well above a front pin, or well below a back pin location.

“At the end of the day the fun is in the playing for most, but the historic characteristics add another layer of enjoyment for a lot of players,” said Esler. “Mt. Prospect will provide an opportunity for public golfers to experience a style of golf that has only been accessible to the very, very few and fortunate.”

The re-design of the course and facilities makes all golfers in the Chicagoland area the fortunate ones. Mt. Prospect Golf Club should be quickly added to your “must play” list because it's no longer your father's (or grandfather's for that matter) old layout.

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