



*Baltusrol*

### **Baltusrol Golf Club Restores Tillinghast Greatness**

The restoration of Baltusrol Golf Club's Lower Course has been completed by Gil Hanse. The renowned A.W. Tillinghast course opened in 1922 as part of Baltusrol's historic "Dual Courses" initiative, the first simultaneous design and build of 36 holes in America. Both the Lower and Upper courses have been the site of numerous championships in professional and amateur golf.

The Lower Course will re-open in May of 2021 after being closed in 2020 for the restoration work. It will host its next major championship, the KPMG Women's PGA Championship, in 2023. The PGA Championship will return to the Lower in 2029 for the third time. Following the success of the Lower Course restoration, the Upper Course is slated for a similar project with Hanse starting in 2024.

In 2018, Baltusrol retained Gil Hanse to help the club prepare its next long-range master plan that started with the restoration of the Lower Course. With the Lower having been modified over the years, most notably by Robert Trent Jones and the USGA prior to the 1954 U.S. Open, the Club wanted to return it to the purity of the Tillinghast design. Trent Jones lengthened the Lower and added multiple bunkers during his "modernization" period, creating a more difficult test of golf that would stand up better to the rigors of the national championship. In the decades that followed, the introduction of additional rough and the gradual shifts in fairway lines and green size from ever-changing maintenance practices had diminished many of Tillinghast's design features and shot values. Rees Jones applied some restoration efforts to the Lower starting in 1991, including an overhaul of the bunkers in 2008, but the Hanse project is the most comprehensive restoration ever undertaken on the Lower.

"We are extremely proud to have restored Tillinghast's original vision for golf throughout the Lower Course," said Matt Wirths, President of Baltusrol and Chair of the Master Plan Committee in charge of the project. The Lower Course project also included substantial infrastructure improvements such as the installation of new drainage, a new irrigation system, a PrecisionAire sub-surface air system for the greens, and the removal of trees throughout the course. As Wirths noted, "Not only have we restored the Tillinghast design, we've updated the infrastructure of the Lower that will have a material impact on its agronomic health and our maintenance procedures for years to come. We feel like we have more control over the course's health and playability going forward."

Added benefits are new tees and tee marker configurations that will allow players of all different skill levels to play and enjoy the course that Tillinghast designed 100 years ago. "Our intent is to give skilled golfers a challenging test while allowing every member ample opportunity for an enjoyable round of golf," Wirths said. Several practice areas also were renovated during the Hanse project.

What does it mean to restore the “design features” and “shot values” of the original architect? Here are a few examples:

- **The Great Hazard.** Tillinghast’s cavernous sand pit, stretching from one side of the fairway to the other, with a mix of sand, tufts of grass, and plant growth. The Great Hazard became one of Tillinghast’s defining design characteristics, and the Lower contains two beautifully restored examples – on the second and seventeenth holes.
- **Fairway Bunkers.** Many Tillinghast bunkers had been removed over the years. The return of fairway bunkers on the second and fifth holes, for example, greatly affect the planning and execution of tee shots on those holes. The bunkers on the second pose more of a visual intimidation while the bunkers on the fifth pose a driving threat, but with options to avoid them.
- **Greens.** Hanse re-built all greens according to USGA specifications and reclaimed dimensions lost over time. The greens now contain 20% more putting surface (in total) by occupying their original fill pads, allowing for more hole locations. A great example is the sixteenth hole, where the rear portion of the putting surface has been bumped out by some 15 feet and sloped up. Hanse’s use of modern, 3D laser mapping technology allowed for green contours to be preserved throughout the Lower.
- **Green Surrounds.** Many greenside bunkers have been re-positioned to allow for the shot values Tillinghast intended. Some bunkers now pinch greens more closely, as on the fourth hole, while others have been moved farther away, as on the fourteenth hole. Ramp approaches have been opened with the removal of centerline approach bunkers, as on the seventh and eighteenth **holes**. These restorations have returned the ground game that Tillinghast so fancied.
- **Fairway Lines.** Hanse has restored the look of wider and twisting fairway lines, rather than the straight lines which Tillinghast believed rob courses of character. A great example on the Lower is the seventh, which almost achieves a double-dogleg effect and whose bunkers now angle into the twisting lines of the fairway.

“Baltusrol never has stood still in the game of golf and the improvement of its facilities,” said Rick Shea, recent President of the Club under whose tenure the Hanse project began. “Almost 100 years ago, our Board of Governors made the bold decision to replace our Old Course, itself a U.S. Open venue, with the Dual Courses of A.W. Tillinghast. We made a similar decision in 2018 not only to restore the Tillinghast greatness but to invest significant infrastructure upgrades in the courses, which we believe will prepare this club for the next 100 years,” he added.

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