

Tillinghast's design elasticity on display

Baltusrol Golf Club in New Jersey will host the 2016 PGA Championship on the club's Lower Course, originally designed by AW Tillinghast. Rees Jones explains why the club's two courses are among the most important the legendary architect ever created



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Located in Springfield, New Jersey, Baltusrol Golf Club has one of the game's most enduring championship legacies. The club has hosted numerous major tournaments since its founding in 1895.

Nearly 100 years ago, Baltusrol made the bold and ultimately successful choice to entrust AW Tillinghast with remaking the club's original Old Course into the Upper and Lower Courses, which still exist today. Baltusrol exemplifies Tillinghast's design elasticity at its finest. Since 1922, the dual courses at Baltusrol have not only provided enjoyment for golfers of all abilities, but have consistently tested the best players in the game.

In July 2016, the Lower Course will host this year's PGA Championship, with the tournament played over the same fairways and greens on which past champions played. The standards of conditioning are now drastically higher at Baltusrol, but the green contours are the same as they were when Tillinghast created them.

The 36 holes at Baltusrol are substantially intact as designed by Tillinghast, and display arguably more representations of his design principles than any of his other designs that are still in their original form today. In many respects, Baltusrol can be considered one of Tillinghast's most important designs. This was one of the reasons Baltusrol Golf Club was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2014 by the National Park Service, becoming one of only four golf properties to hold this distinction.

Tillinghast was prescient in seeing that golf courses should have the flexibility to accommodate future changes in the game, and the courses he built at Baltusrol show his foresight.

Since Tillinghast's time, adherence to his design principles and layout has remained a fundamental rule guiding all improvements at Baltusrol. An example would be the lengthening of the Lower Course by nearly 900 yards, without any routing changes or movement of greens.

In our nearly 30 years of working with the club, we have strived to preserve and reclaim the original Tillinghast design. We have aimed to ensure the course remains enjoyable for its members, as well as being a strict test for the highest level of play.

We first began working with the club in preparation for the 1993 US Open, held on the Lower Course. There had been very little architectural work done on the course since the early 1950s, when my father, Robert Trent Jones, made modifications to prepare it for the 1954 US Open. We then worked with the club to create a masterplan in 1991, with some of the proposed work taking place prior to the 1993 Open. The work focused primarily on adding length to the course, implementing and tweaking bunkers, and rebuilding tees.

Following the 2005 PGA Championship, we worked with the club to develop a new masterplan for the Lower Course. All of our renovation and restoration work has relied on archival photographs and aerial maps to make sure the design stays true to its past and the Tillinghast legacy. This project included a bunker renovation plan which restored depth to all of the bunkers, added several new ones, re-positioned fairway bunkers to make them more relevant for today's game, and returned bunkers to the Tillinghast style. Ramp approaches to the greens – a distinctive Tillinghast feature at Baltusrol – were restored to their original dimensions. A great example is the enlarged ramp leading to the 17th green.



On a number of holes on the Lower Course at Baltusrol, including the 18th and (below) 13th, recent restoration work by Rees Jones and his team has brought the meandering tributaries back into play

While the green contours serve as a form of hazard, requiring proper placement of both the tee and approach shots, they are also subtle enough that their slopes and hole locations are enhanced at tournament speeds. Green expansion occurred on several holes, including the fifth, 12th, 15th and 18th, where back green sections were restored to their original dimensions. In addition, collection areas were added behind the greens on two holes – the first and the 12th – complementing the one that already existed on the fifth hole.

Tillinghast used the meandering tributaries at Baltusrol as hazards on numerous holes on the Lower Course. Over time, the fairways of the 10th, 13th and 18th holes had crept away from the water. On the 10th and 13th holes, we brought the stream back into play. The 10th now has one of the most challenging tee shots on the course for the better player. With its oblique angle framed by fairway bunkers on the left and a creek running diagonally up the right side, the 13th is a fine example of a short par four design. On the 18th hole, we enlarged the pond on the left side of the hole to return it to the edge of the fairway, making it once again a formidable hazard on the final hole.



Baltusrol exemplifies the type of course Tillinghast foresaw as being the model for courses of the future. We have been fortunate to have the opportunity to spend many years studying Tillinghast's masterpiece and working closely with the club's leadership and administration to preserve and enhance his legacy. The Lower Course should produce a challenging but fair test of golf for the 98th

PGA Championship, and the members of Baltusrol will be able to continue enjoying their facility, as Tillinghast intended, for years to come. **GCA**

Rees Jones has designed or redesigned more than 170 courses and has been president of Rees Jones Inc. since 1974