



Donald Ross Society's Featured Club Bradenton Country Club



Bradenton Country Club

Note from the Architect, Tony Jacklin, C.B.E.

When I was asked to supervise the course renovations at Bradenton Country Club, I felt it was a good opportunity to give the place a total face lift bringing it into the 21st century but preserving what the great Donald Ross had created.

My vision for the course was to simplify things for the superintendent and his staff so they can focus on tees, greens, and fairways. Eliminating the tarmac cart paths and creating “native areas with wispy grasses” like Ross had written on the original drawings all while removing deciduous trees and replacing with local palms was a main focus of our project. As I’ve continued to say that this course is so central to our community and it deserved better. These changes have ensured success for the club well into the future. Esthetically it is head and shoulders above anything in the area.

Preservation of Donald Ross Architecture

- **Greens, Surrounds, and Bunkering**

- *Research about Ross Architecture*

- It is widely believed that all “true” Donald Ross greens are turtle backed and the slopes are mown at fairway height around the entire green. This is not entirely true. Ross believed in randomness on the greens, around the greens, as well as bunker types.
- Donald Ross believed that all areas around greens should force the golfer to play every type of shot possible. He wanted players to have sidehill lies, uphill lies, and even down hill lies in the grass around the greens.
- Many believe that Ross was a proponent of grass face bunkers instead of high flashes of sand, when in fact research shows he liked the later early in his career and later evolved to grass faced bunkers toward the end. But there is a catch. He also believed that there needed to be variety and randomness to bunkers.

- How we used Ross Architecture research at BCC
 - Like many modern-day Ross courses BCC has some greens that are turtle backed but the majority of them are either sloped from back to front or follow the natural curves of the land. In fact, our greens closely follow the traditional Ross structure of randomness around the course.
 - Our green surrounds match history with what modern-day Ross courses have embraced. We have the closely mown collection areas that are synonymous with Pinehurst #2, but we also left many areas rough that forces the uneven sidehill, uphill, and downhill lies Ross loved.
 - Like many modern Ross courses and quite frankly most modern-day designers we have embraced the ease of maintenance with the faces of our greenside bunkers being grass but we have also preserved the randomness of Ross bunkering. Not all bunkers on BCC are grass faced, we left all our fairway bunkers as high flashes so that the Ross randomness would show.

- **Course Layout and Trees**
 - Research about Ross Architecture
 - During the early 1900's when Ross was designing courses heavy equipment was not available and he was forced choose land that had very few trees, especially in Florida. Almost all his courses were designed as "park style" courses which means the holes were close to each other and confined with a small area. There were no golf carts then and everyone walked while playing.
 - Ross once wrote, "as beautiful as trees are, we must not lose sight of the fact that there is a limited place for them in golf." Many clubs in the 70's added ornamental trees for beautification, then in the 80's for safety between holes, and finally in the 90's to make holes tougher and help defend par. The fact is that all these trees made it very difficult to grow grass and preserve the original site lines Ross created.

 - How we used Ross Architecture research at BCC
 - Like many Ross courses the routing of holes was changed at BCC over the years to accommodate different amenities and a larger clubhouse. It was virtually impossible for us to take it back to the original hole routing, but we did add a statue of Donald Ross with a plaque between green #13 and tee #14 that reads, "This is where Donald Ross originally started this 1924 classic. Here he stands today to overlook the beginning and finishing holes of his masterpiece."
 - Like most Ross courses BCC was overrun with unnecessary trees that were not part of the original design or even native to our area in Florida. We removed 556 of them and replaced them with 225 native palms. This allowed us to make the site lines more authentic to Ross and also helped us to grow healthier turf. In a 1967 newspaper article a longtime member was quoted saying, "it was a pretty thing nestled between all those oaks and palms." With this renovation it allowed us to add palms back to where they had been replaced with invasive trees and at the same time showcase our beautiful oaks.

- **Cart Paths and Native Areas**

- Research About Ross Architecture

- As we went through the original drawings from Ross, we kept reading “native areas with wispy grasses” on most of the holes. That showed us that most areas on the sides of the holes were native areas instead of modern days roughs since mower heights were not around in the 20’s.

- How we used Ross Architecture research at BCC

- Part of the tree removal process to preserve our Donald Ross masterpiece was to create the “native areas with wispy grasses” he mentioned in the original drawings. We researched long and hard to find material that was native to Florida and could handle carts driving on it all day but still be soft enough to deem in play. What we found was crushed Florida limestone and Muley Grasses. These native areas are found on every hole at BCC.
- Since we had followed the Ross native areas, we felt it important to follow the native areas into our cart paths as well. If Donald Ross was alive today and standing at BCC, he would not have wanted asphalt or concrete paths for golf carts he would want the natural area to show through.