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Liberty National's hole-by-hole changes



Liberty National has undergone renovations since first hosting The Barclays in 2009.

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When The Barclays returns to Liberty National this week, watch for a markedly different golf course to greet players than that of four years ago.

Not long after Heath Slocum won the 2009 event here, the PGA TOUR teamed up with club founder Paul Fireman, course construction company Heritage Links and architects Bob Cupp and Tom Kite to make the visually striking, waterfront layout even better.

"In a nutshell, the goal was to try and increase the playability of the course, primarily focusing on the greens' overall receptiveness to approach shots," said Steve Wenzloff, the PGA TOUR'S vice president of design services and player liaison.

No one could ever deny the uniqueness of Liberty National. Once the site of a toxic landfill, the property is positioned along the New Jersey side of New York Harbor, offering gorgeous views of the Manhattan skyline and the Statue of Liberty. But it became apparent during The Barclays 2009 that some softening of the 3-year-old track was necessary, as approach shots — even good ones — often repelled through the greens in a somewhat penal manner.

Some players were verbally critical of the track, despite the fact that it produced a truly exciting Sunday finish. There was no question that the course was immature and needed some work after the 2009 event. It wasn't so much that the greens needed to be rebuilt, but rather that the greens required expansion and re-contouring to allow for more pin placements.

So Wenzloff and his team went to work, retooling a total of 12 greens and altering 12 tee boxes, which greatly increased set-up flexibility and spectator flow.

In addition, portions of 13 fairways were re-contoured at Liberty National, with numerous fairway bunkers repositioned and an intermediate cut of rough grown throughout the course to buffer its bent grass fairways from its blue fescue primary rough.

"In some cases, fairways were widened," says Wenzloff. "For instance, on the third hole, we moved the entire fairway bunker to the right to widen the landing area. It was one of the tightest on the course, flanked by fescues. It was too tight. And there wasn't much intermediate rough on some holes. So we added that between the bent grass and the fescues. In fact, that's the sort of thing we did on several holes."

Wenzloff says the goal was not to change the course, but to make it more receptive to high-level competition. "I think you should really see a big difference in the setup this year," he says.

And that should result in a much more playable golf course for the field — and a more spectator-friendly track for those following the action.