

Knollwood CC's 14th— an intimidating golf link

Editor's note: This one of a series of articles examining the toughest holes at local golf courses.

By JOHN BOZZO

I stopped the electric cart carrying me and Southfield Farmington sports editor Tom Barr next to one driven by Knollwood Country Club head professional John Molenda.

We sat on a hill overlooking the 14th green. The beautifully trimmed fairways and greens seemed to stare on this sunny day in West Bloomfield.

"Do you see that green back was off in the distance," Molenda asked.

Tom spotted the structure first and after he pointed in its direction, I could barely distinguish a small speck.

That's where you'll be teeing off from, Molenda said. From the blue tee, it measures 600 yards, primarily uphill. On the tee shot, there's about 115 yards of water to carry, but it's more of an intimidation than a hazard.

AFTER LOSING every golf ball I had in the water at Knollwood Hills Country Club's 14th last week, I borrowed every spare golf ball my father had and took advantage of a Watson's special to buy six more for 76 cents.

Resolving not to lose any or as many

golf balls, I drove to the tee to face the problem at hand—a tee shot over water and a hill.

It turns out to be quite an intimidating hole because of the length and the characteristics," Molenda added as we stepped onto the tee. "A lot of members try to force their shots, which doesn't help them because they need accuracy as well as distance."

There's a very slight dog leg to the left," he added. "Maybe a 15 to 20 degree dog leg. As you get near the green every thing funnels down. There's an out of bounds to the right, tree's on the left, and a severe drop-off on the back."

I had no reason to doubt Molenda's word about the hole's characteristics. He's been a professional golfer for 12 years, the past four at Knollwood Country Club and spent two years on the professional golf tour.

He said he left the golf tour in 1988 after injuring his arm in the Cleveland Open. He pulled a tendon when the club he was swinging hit a tree stump buried in the ground.

Molenda's interest in golf began at age 14 when he caddied at Knollwood.

Having stalled as long as I could, I took my driver and knocked my tee shot directly over the water, pushing it to some trees on the right about 300 yards away.

We found the ball in the rough, and although it was behind some trees, I still had a chance to launch a good second shot.

Now, you've got to hit a low shot right through these trees," Molenda said and I took out my three-wood and clobbered a ground ball, which dribbled forward about 10 yards.

That was low," Molenda smiled.

Waiting forward, I repeated the same mistake and hit another ground ball.

You're not using your arms," offered Molenda. "Sometimes when you top a fair way, you'd like that it's a sign that you're bringing the club head back with your wrists instead of your arms."

Although I was not expecting to receive a golf lesson while doing this column, I was nonetheless grateful for the advice and willing to try, just about anything, at that point. As instructed, I brought the club back with my arms and hit the ball another 300 yards, but I was still in the rough.

The four shots had brought me to about 110 yards from the green. I took a live iron out and attempted to hit the ball over the trap in front of the green and away from the trees and out-of-bounds fence on the right. But instead of knocking a beautiful shot next to the put, I topped the ball into the bottom of a ball in front of the green.

Besides lying at the bottom of the hill, I was stymied by a tree and had to take a drop in preparation for my seventh shot, creating a penalty stroke for the drop on this par five hole.

Molenda again offered more advice, explaining that I was probably not putting enough weight on my left leg and not following through properly. He also noticed that I was playing the ball too far to my left and added that the ball should be played to the middle and 60 percent of my weight should be on my left leg.

YOU'RE MISSING the best part of this column—the fairways," Molenda said. "They're just like walking on a carpet and the ball sits up so nice on them."

Handily aware of this fact, I topped through more rough and knocked a nine-iron shot about 110 yards in the fringe just past the green.

Throughout the hole, Molenda had talked about the severe pitch slope of the green, and now he informed me that my troubles had just begun.

Standing at the back of the green, I could see its slope going downhill and the rolling contour of its surface.

You have to chip it here," Molenda said, pointing to a spot to the left of the hole, "because it will break dead right."

My chip landed a little past the spot indicated and broke dead right. I was left with about a six-foot putt.

Molenda instructed me to aim my putt four or five inches above the hole, but the first attempt stopped short and below the hole. I holed the second putt from two feet away for an 11 on the hole.



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Village SC clobbers foe

Four MacMillan sisters—Lisa, Sue, Nancy and Chris—learned to establish a Village Swim Club record of 1:04.0 in the girls' 46-year (Combined age) freestyle relay as Village dominated Pleasant Ridge Swim Club, 386-177, in a Northwest Suburban League meet last Thursday.

Bill Dunn and Dave Smith also set team records in the 15-17 year competition. Dunn set his mark in the 100-yard freestyle (1:52.1), while Smith set a record in the 50-yard freestyle (1:22.1) and also won the 100-yard individual medley (1:08.4).

Other Village double winners 15-17-year group—Lisa Hess, 56-yard breaststroke (1:24.0) and 100-yard IM (1:54.1); Lisa's group—Glen Hummon, 50 breast (1:40.1) and 100 IM (1:23.9); Lisa MacMillan, 50 back (1:36.1) and 50 butterfly (1:34.1); Sue MacMillan, 50 fly (1:23.9) and 100 breast (1:36.1); 11-13 group—Nancy MacMillan, 50 free (1:37.1) and 100 IM (1:27.1); Dan Russell, 50 fly (1:44.9) and 100 IM (1:34.1); Beth Saunders, 50 fly (1:38.1) and 100 IM (1:22.1); seven-and-eight group—Marilee Konczal, 25 free (1:18.1) and 25 breast (1:27.1).

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