

INSIGHT HAWAII INSIGHT

Kapalua Golf's Plantation Course closing for refresh

By **Tovin Lapan**

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After Kapalua Golf introduced a range of improvements to its Bay Course and practice and teaching facilities in 2018, the north Maui property is now set to embark on a major refresh of its more challenging Plantation Course in 2019.

The celebrated course, which just finished hosting the PGA's Sentry Tournament of Champions, will close next month and is scheduled to reopen in time for the 2020 Tournament of Champions in January.

The original Plantation Course team, including designers Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw, and Mark Rolfing, NBC golf commentator and one of the original developers of the course, have been brought back for the project. Rolfing lives in Maui and has worked with Kapalua Golf throughout its history.

"We're kind of putting the team back together," Rolfing said. "We've got the bunker shaper, designers ... a lot of the original guys. This way we have a phenomenal chance of restoring the course to the original intent and integrity of the first design."

The Plantation Course opened in 1991 and has not had a major renovation or revamp in its history. But golf, and the conditions in north Maui, have changed in the last 30 years, Rolfing said. Players hit the ball farther than before, and there has been more rain in the last few years compared to when the course was first built. The course routing will not change, but it is being regressed, and some bunkers will be moved, added or eliminated.

"We are making some fairly significant changes in terms of playability," Rolwing said. "Anyone watching the tournament last week could see how soft the golf course is. We're going through a mini-climate change here, and it may be cyclical, but the last three years have been very wet."

That makes the course slow, Rolwing said, which makes it easier for the pros to put the ball exactly where they want to while making it harder on the "resort players" who need harder fairways and a faster course to help eke out all the extra yardage they can.

"Changing out the grass will help, but we'll also be conditioning and treating the greens and parts of the fairways to help create the firm, fast conditions that were the original intent for the course," Rolwing said.

Some new, shorter tees will be added for casual players while some holes will get new, farther tee boxes that will further challenge the pros.

The Plantation Clubhouse will also be updated with a new roof, new doors and windows, and an interior refresh with new paint, flooring, restrooms and locker rooms.

Kapalua Golf unveiled updates and changes to its Bay Course and practice facilities in 2018. The Bay Course was resequenced so players finish on the oceanview holes. The golf shop was relocated and the Village Center now serves as a hub of Kapalua Golf with shops, the Taverna restaurant and the Golf Academy, which has been enhanced with an expanded putting green and practice range.

"The practice areas were sort of spread out before between the Bay Course and Plantation Course," Rolwing said. "Now, they've created this premier facility at the center of the resort with more space, and it's the golf center of Kapalua that was always meant to be when we first conceived of it."