



KAPALUA GOLF RAISING THE BAR AGAIN!

BY JEFF BABINEAU

We live in a time when no longer is it odd news to hear that after decades apart, some famous band somewhere is getting back together and making music again. The Rolling Stones still tour the globe and perform, and The Who and other famous rockers have rejoined forces, too.

So why not organize the reunion of a band of impassioned golf brothers that nearly three decades ago brought to life one of the most breathtaking and picturesque golf courses in the world, the sprawling Plantation Course at Kapalua Resort?

Architects Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw and three of the original shapers will join agronomists from Troon Golf and gather once more on the island in February to give the Plantation a refreshing new appearance. Holes will be altered only subtly, so this wouldn't be classified as a true renovation; instead, Coore

prefers to call the work to be done weeks after the 2019 Sentry Tournament of Champions a "refinement." Think of it as an invigorating morning Kona breeze.

The Plantation, which opened in 1991 and is host to the PGA TOUR's Sentry Tournament of Champions each January, will be completely regressed – tees, fairways and greens – a few new tees will be added, and every bunker will be worked on.

"There will be a few new tees built to address the tournament players, and a few bunkers moved, but more than anything, there's going to be refinements made for the resort players," said Coore, who has teamed with Crenshaw to form one of the most heralded design teams anywhere in the world. "There will be more new forward tees built than there are tees for the tournament, by far. A few bunkers will be eliminated that are more in the resort



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players' area of play. We're trying to address tournament play yes, but more importantly, we want to address what is happening with the resort player."

An update to The Plantation is one of several scheduled improvements at Kapalua led by Troon Golf, which is deeply committed to enhancing the overall resort experience for its guests. While the course is closed, the clubhouse at the Plantation will be completely refreshed, with new roofing, new doors and locker room and hallway renovations. Additionally, changes completed at the end of 2018 included moving the center island counter of the Plantation golf shop to bring a more open look, new practice tees and an expanded practice green installed at the Kapalua Golf Academy, and The Bay Course moved its golf shop next door, giving players on the Bay a better warm-up experience before their rounds.

"Our ownership wants the best for West Maui and has made a significant investment to protect the golf experience to the highest level," said Alex Nakajima, general manager for Troon Golf at Kapalua. "The beauty, the nature, and the resort itself ... we want it to last for the long term."

Work on the Plantation is set to begin after the 2019 tournament, in early February, with the course scheduled to be shut

down for nine months. That means more resort play on The Bay Course, which will undergo some changes. The Bay, designed by Arnold Palmer and opened in 1975, is returning to its original routing. The pro shop will move and expand by end of 2018 to the facility that once served as the clubhouse for The Village Course, closer to the Kapalua Golf Academy. What has been the seventh hole, an uphill dogleg par-4 that bends gently to the right, will become the Bay's opening hole. That means two of the course's more dramatic holes along the ocean—the downhill par-4 fourth and scenic par-3 fifth, often played amid the splashing ocean mist, will move to later in the round, as holes 16 and 17. The Bay will finish with the straightaway par-5, one final birdie opportunity that routes a player back to the new clubhouse.

"The entire Bay experience will be amazing," Nakajima said. As will the Plantation experience when it is completed, the layout modernized to challenge the best players in the world while at the same time returning to the firm-and-fast characteristics that make the course so playable and enjoyable to resort golfers.

Coore vividly remembers watching PGA TOUR professional Andy Bean taking on the Plantation's bending, par-5 18th hole in the early years of the Kapalua International, an unofficial late-season event for pros. The turf down the 18th fairway was so





firm that Bean hit a driver and 6-iron into the 633-yard hole, his second shot landing about 70 yards short of the green, then rolling, and rolling, and rolling some more ... until it vanished into the hole for a double-eagle.

“That’s the type of golf that can benefit the tournament player, but more than anything will benefit the resort player,” Coore said. Climate variations on Maui through the years have led to softening turf conditions, something that will be addressed. Mark Roling, the NBC golf analyst who has made Kapalua his home for 40 years, says he looks forward to Coore and Crenshaw’s revamped bunkering at the Plantation eliciting the emotion that it did in the course’s early years. “The bunkers basically screamed, ‘Don’t come in here!’” Roling said. “Visually, they were such a big part of the whole experience.”

Since all the greens will be regrassed, it gives Coore and Crenshaw, who will consult with PGA TOUR staff, a chance to fine-tune some of their original contours. For instance, the right side of the green at Plantation’s sixth hole will be expanded to help overall playability (approach shots shoot hard right off the left-side slope) and grades will be softened near shelves at Nos. 10 and 13 to add more potential hole locations during tournament week.

Some new tees will be built, including a double tee moved farther back on Nos. 3 and 9, joining a new tee for the par-4 fourth built behind the third green. The tee shot at Plantation’s uphill fourth hole once presented one of the more intimidating drives on the golf course; today’s players, longer and armed with better technology in clubs and balls, now blast drives over the corner that finish within 80 yards of the green.

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“Our priority, quite candidly,” Coore said, “is so much more for members or, if it’s a resort course, the people who are going to play it on a more frequent basis. Particularly on the greens and around the greens, if a course is interestingly done, it will be able to measure up to the best players. We don’t really try to make a course longer and longer and longer. We try to do it so that the long players can still play ... but at the same time they have to play some very interesting shots, maybe finesse shots. That’s sort of the equalizer.”

The challenge is re-instilling the importance and integrity of playing angles on approach shots and making them more challenging and interesting. Few architects do that better than Coore and Crenshaw, who have built an incredible portfolio since cutting the ribbon at Kapalua. The Plantation Course and Barton Creek in Texas were the very first projects that they opened.

And now they have a chance to go back and refreshen what has been hailed as one of the game’s truly great masterpieces, a course that dovetails so well with the beauty of the island and surrounding ocean. Kapalua’s ground game will be back, returning the course to the way it was meant to be played. Coore, Crenshaw and their devoted band will see to it. All are excited to get started.

As for the overall beauty of Kapalua, there are no changes needed. Whenever Nakajima steps away from his desk on the second floor of the Plantation and looks out to the rollicking whitecaps in azure waters off in the distance, he instantly is reminded that he has one of the best office views in the entire golf industry. “I’ve been all over Hawai’i, to all the islands, and this place is magical,” he said. “It’s a magical place.”