

The Maui News

Plantation Course taking shape

\$10 million renovation to home of Sentry Tournament of Champions is on schedule

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Sentry Tournament of Champions general manager Alex Urban (left) points out changes to the Kapalua Plantation Course's 10th tee while giving PGA Tour officials a tour of the course's extensive renovations Wednesday. The Maui News / MATTHEW THAYER photos

KAPALUA — Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore certainly enjoy a challenge.

When the need arose to refurbish the Kapalua Plantation Course — the second golf course the pair of renowned designers built together back in 1991— they were more than ready.

On Wednesday, the home of the Sentry Tournament of Champions looked nothing like it did on Jan. 6 when Xander Schauffele tore it up to win the 2019 TOC crown. Schauffele shot a final-round, course-record-tying 11-under-par 62, bringing the fourth-longest course on the PGA Tour to its knees.

The course closed on Feb. 11 for work that is slated to last until November to get a near complete makeover: New greens, new tee boxes, new fairway grass are among the major work, while all of the bunkers are being redone as well.

Crenshaw, a two-time winner of the Masters, said the work is on schedule.



Two-time Masters champion Ben Crenshaw listens as design partner Bill Coore answers a question Wednesday at the Kapalua Plantation Course's clubhouse.

“Obviously, from the beginning there was a time frame because we, in our minds, had to have everything in the ground basically at the end of June,” Crenshaw, 67, said. *“And we’re very close. We’re down to editing our last few greens for final contour, so there’s some greens ready to be planted next week.”*

Coore, a 1968 graduate of Wake Forest, began his golf course design career in 1972 with Pete Dye and Associates.

“On schedule, meaning, the big work, the major work will be completed primarily by the end of June,” Coore said. *“There will be follow-up work, you know, smaller, incremental things that have to be attended to past that. We’re pretty pleased with the schedule.”*

So far, according to an email from Kapalua’s director of sales and marketing Kelly Williams, six greens have been planted with TifEagle Bermuda grass and 10 greens have been reshaped.

All of the bunkers on the course have been rough shaped, with the bunkers on the front nine and No. 18 completed. A new professional tee box has been added to No. 10, while the tee box on No. 15 is being rebuilt.



Ben Crenshaw (right) and Bill Coore inspect the grade of the Kapalua Plantation Course's fourth green Wednesday.

To date, 63 acres of Celebration Bermuda grass has been planted on fairways, with 43 to go.

Crenshaw said he did not imagine being back on Maui to do such comprehensive work like this when the Plantation Course opened in 1991. The TOC event has played there since 1999 and the refurbishment — which is costing more than \$10 million plus the loss of revenue from a course that sees more than 50,000 rounds a year — was announced at the 2019 event.

“I really don’t think so, I really don’t,” Crenshaw said. “I’ve got to be honest: Our grass was fine. The trends of the industry and what the PGA Tour wanted was the Celebration Bermuda (grass type).

“That’s what they wanted, but there’s no question that our greens needed a little more calming to offer some more pin placements.”

Crenshaw said the new greens will add to the challenge of the course that measured 7,518 yards in January and will add 50-60 more yards to that total with all the work currently being done.



Coore fine-tunes the fourth green.

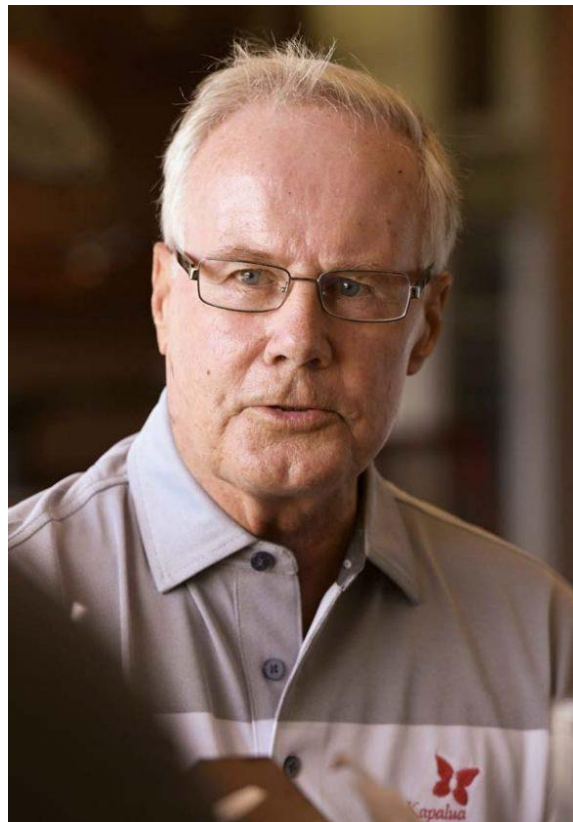
Part of the challenge is keeping the Plantation Course challenging for the PGA Tour winners who play in the TOC, and then enticing enough for the amateurs who play on it for the other 51 weeks of the year.

“There’s some really, I think, interesting greens now,” Crenshaw said. “They’re not quite as slopey, but there’s some real interesting contours now that everybody should enjoy. Not only just the pros, I mean everybody.”

When the course was designed, Kapalua resident and Golf Channel analyst Mark Roling said the tradewinds blew more than 300 days a year. Only two of the last 10 tournaments have had prominent tradewinds, Roling said.

“This course, as you know, is geared for windy play,” Crenshaw said. “Yeah, it’s slopey, it’s dramatic, but the contours on the greens, we like it a lot. They’ve come down just a bit.”

Coore said the work this time around is easier simply because the magnitude of the entire project is less than it was the first time.



Mark Roling describes the early days of the Plantation Course’s development.

“We’re just trying to take the foundation of what was created 30 years ago and do some refinements to it,” Coore said. “In addition to the refinements, we’re trying to recapture a lot of the elements of the course that sort of faded away through all those years.”

The goals are simple.

“The most prominent one of those elements would be the playability,” Coore said.

“Years ago you would hit the ball out here and it would chase and chase and chase unbelievable distances. As the grass matured and grew and grew for 30 years, a lot of that element was lost, where the ball didn’t roll nearly as far.

“That actually made the golf course much more difficult for the resort players because the ball didn’t go as far and for the very best players in the world who would play in the championship here, it was actually easier.”

The Plantation Course was the second of the 29 courses that Crenshaw and Coore have collaborated on to open, but it is clearly still one of their favorites.

Crenshaw and his wife Julie were married in Kapalua 33 years ago.

“This atmosphere takes the cake,” Crenshaw said. *“There’s nothing like this anywhere. You cast your eye on any hole and you just see magnificence. It’s part of West Maui — that’s what it is. So, our course reflects that. It’s fun, it’s challenging, too. This is just a refinement of what was here — it’s not going to play that much different.”*

Coore added, *“We truly hope it’s going to play much more as it did (before). We view that as a positive for the resort players, but for the tournament players, they’ve really not experienced that in any recent years. The players who play here now have watched it probably most of their lives on TV, but maybe not experienced it as keen and quick as we hope it will be this coming year.”*

Rolfing has watched the Plantation Course evolve from the host of the Kapalua International unofficial event he hosted there from 1991-98, to TOC’s run from 1999 to now.

It was time to do the current work, Rolfing said. Consultation between Crenshaw, Coore and PGA Tour officials led to the decision that the renovation was necessary.

“Well, it really has grown up and it has really changed in its character — not in terms of its physical character as much as in the way that it plays,” Rolwing said. “When this course opened we nicknamed it immediately ‘The Planet.’ It was like playing golf in some sort of outer-worldly atmosphere.

“Everything was so extreme and it was really fun. Not that it’s not fun now, but I think for the recreational golfer it’s lost a little bit of its enjoyment because it plays so long. ... Everybody wants to hit the ball far, that was part of the fun of playing this course, being able to hit low running shots that scampered forever. One of the main goals for both championship play and every other week is to recapture that.”