

ILLINOIS GOLFER

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The new Medinah No. 3

Membership approves extensive changes to back nine

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SPECIAL ISSUE



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COVER

RENDERING OF CAMEL TRAIL SHORT COURSE
COURTESY OCM / HARRIS | KALINKA

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The Grill Room by Tim Cronin

Medinah rolls the dice

It's been a long time, nearly a century, since four Shriners with golf and making a cool profit on their mind scouted the rural area northwest of Chicago in search of land for a golf and country club.

They found it on a handful of farms, some wooded and some not, arranged to take over the land, and the Medinah Country Club was on the way.

It would have three golf courses designed by Tom Bendelow, one of the foremost, and certainly the most prolific, golf course architects, of the day.

Those three courses have stood the test of time, but not completely. No. 1 was revamped a few years ago by Tom Doak. A couple of holes are still close to what Bendelow dreamed up. Others might be closer to what he would have built today. Call No. 1 a Doakelow.

No. 2 is closest to the original, having been restored by Rees Jones recently to recover old green contours.

Then there's No. 3. By our count after extensive research for the club's 75th anniversary book and beyond, this is the seventh renovation of No. 3. It is certainly the most extensive.

Medinah is taking a big gamble here. No. 3 was enough of a test for its membership. But Medinah is a club that likes to open the fancy entry gate to the world and host big-time golf. To the membership, the low scores of the 2019 BMW Championship – in soft conditions –



Illinois Golfer Archive

THE ORIGINAL Tom Bendelow was among golf's most sophisticated designers by the time he arrived at Medinah Country Club.

meant an overhaul was needed to bring No. 3 back into the conversation as a tough test.

Was it? Won't someone post a 63 the next time around? Won't 20-under win the next stroke-play fandango?

We'll see. If this doesn't work, well, the bulldozers won't be far away.

An aerial photograph of a golf course. In the foreground, a large, irregularly shaped green is visible, with a sand trap to its right. A wide water hazard, likely a lake or pond, occupies the middle ground, with a wooden bridge crossing it from the left. The background shows a line of trees and more of the golf course's rolling terrain.

ILLINOIS GOLFER COVER STORY

Medinah's New Look

Geoff Ogilvy leads renovation plan for No. 3

BY TIM CRONIN

Rendering of new No. 17: OCM Golf / Harris | Kalinka

No. 3 renovation will change feel of the course

Medinah Country Club does nothing in half measures. Told in the 1980s by the hierarchy of the United States Golf Association that the 18th hole of their fabled No. 3 courses needed to be changed in order to get another U.S. Open, the membership voted – barely and contentiously – to revamp most of the back nine to make it happen.

The Open came, Hale Irwin won it, and since then, with various tweaks and tucks by a succession of designers, the course has been dabbled with while hosting a pair of PGA Championships won by Tiger Woods, the 2012 Ryder Cup captured by Europe in a dramatic comeback, and the 2019 BMW Championship – ye olde Western Open – in which a succession of players headed by Justin Thomas showed the layout to be defenseless when dampened by rains. The course record fell twice, Thomas’ 11-under-par 61 in the third round the centerpiece in his winning total of 25-under-par 263. The sun had not set on that Saturday when some Medinah members began to whisper that bulldozers would soon be on the landscape.

They were right. On Saturday, Dec. 18, about a year after the Australian trio of Geoff Ogilvy, Mike Cocking and Ashley Mead, a.k.a. OCM Golf, were engaged to come up with a master plan to revamp No. 3, Medinah’s membership voted by a 5-to-1 margin to approve the plan. Construction is expected to commence sometime in 2022, with a goal to reopen No. 3 in the spring of 2024, two years and a summer in advance of the 2026 Presidents Cup.

The price tag has not yet been made public, but rest assured that Medinah can handle it. The club, which has roughly 600 members, has rebuilt No. 1 and remodeled No. 2 in the last decade, plus

MEDINAH COUNTRY CLUB						
No. 3 Championship Course						
DATE	20					
Hole	GREEN	WEDGE	WEDGE	WEDGE	PAR	
1	300	360	385	445	4	
2	140	375	180	205	3	
3	365	400	400	425	4	
4	325	400	435	485	4	
5	440	490	500	535	5	
6	360	385	445	495	4	
7	460	560	600	655	5	
8	155	175	200	215	3	
9	355	425	465	490	4	
OUT	2900	3335	3610	3950	36	
10	455	515	575	590	5	
11	275	315	380	390	4	
12	370	440	470	505	4	
13	120	140	150	160	3	
14	350	435	455	475	4	
15	250	415	475	520	4	
16	280	325	350	380	4	
17	120	135	170	225	3	
18	345	470	500	500	5	
IN	2565	3190	3525	3745	36	
TOTAL	5465	6525	7135	7695	72	

Tim "Tee-K" Kelly via Twitter

NEW CARD The approximate yardages for No. 3.

built a practice building at its range and expanded its clubhouse as well.

“It’s going to be bold, it’s going to be brave,” Medinah board member Ryan Potts wrote on Twitter on Sunday. “It’s going to be unlike any other renovation to Course #3. OCM Golf challenged us to use the best parts of the land and the members are all in. Should be fun.”

Said Ogilvy, the 2006 U.S. Open champion, when his group was retained, “We feel incredibly humbled and excited to be working with Medinah on the redevelopment of Course No. 3.” He’s playing in the Sandbelt Invitational, the tournament he created, at Royal Melbourne and other Australian sand belt courses, this week and so far has been unavailable for comment, but Medinah’s membership was impressed by the idea of bringing an Alister MacKenzie ascetic to the course. Part of OCM’s mission statement lauding MacKenzie reads, “these courses are the epitome of strategic design, using width and brilliant green complexes to create angles and interest that appeal to everyone from the high handicapper to tournament professional.”

The OCM website goes into more detail on the design philosophy:

“The contour of a green, the position of hazards, and the shape and slope of the fairway can all be used to create holes that make the golfer

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MEDINAH COUNTRY CLUB

MASTER PLAN

Course #3



OCM

November 2021

THE PLAN The major changes to No. 3 begin at the 13th tee, but every hole has a new look; also note the short course adjacent to the 16th and 18th fairways.



Rendering OCM Golf / Harris | Kalinka

THE LAST The 18th tee is on the south side of Lake Kadajah, playing to the fairway of what will be a 500-yard par-5 finishing hole, allowing the potential of an eagle to win.

think: What side of the fairway makes for a better line to the green? How close to the hazard am I willing to aim? How badly do I need a par, or a birdie? Our favourite designs ask these sorts of

questions and offer a multitude of options. Sometimes the strategies are obvious but more often than not only trial and error will reveal the best route to the hole.

“This principle is best illustrated on The Old Course at St. Andrews – the oldest and certainly the most interesting course in the world. Staggering that the oldest and most interesting course

wasn't really designed by anyone...it simply evolved. It can take dozens of rounds to begin to understand the intricacies of the Old Course and that's before you really get to know how the wind or a different pin position can alter your best line of play. With bunkers randomly scattered over a wide, crumpled landscape and enormous double greens there is seemingly endless number of ways to play each hole."

The revamping of Medinah has no double-greens, but it plays over a crumpled landscape, some of which hasn't been used before.

A hole-by-hole look at the six revamped holes, what they replace, and the history of what had once been there:

No. 13 will be a 160-yard par 3 (yardages come from the proposed scorecard, and are listed from the championship tee), but no longer does the 13th – originally the 17th – play across the water. Instead, it has been turned 90 degrees and plays to the west-southwest, and considerably shortened from the knee-weakening 245-yard maximum of the old test. The new green will be on a bluff, to the right side of the current 14th fairway and just short of the still-extant site of the original 14th green in Tom Bendelow's 1930 plan. That par-3 disappeared in Roger Packard's 1986 renovation, though the site is still used as a turf nursery.

No. 14, currently a 609-yard par 5 that crosses the water going south, is revamped into a 475-yard par-4 more akin to Bendelow's 15th hole of decades before. It becomes a dogleg right with a pair of greenside bunkers rather than the snaggle-toothed set of five fronting the current green.

No. 15 is a new hole replacing the old 15th – originally the 12th – and encompassing a new teeing area close to the start of the 11th fairway

and using the second half of the 16th hole, with a new green and bunkering on the site of the current green. With not nearly as much of a dogleg as the current 16th, which will be remembered for Hale Irwin's career 2-iron to short range for a critical birdie in the 1990 U.S. Open, as well as Sergio Garcia's shot from the root of a tree in the 1999 PGA Championship, it'll play 520 yards rather than the old 482. It should remain a difficult test.

No. 16 is also new, a Charles Blair Macdonald-style Cape hole playing from a spot close to the current elevated 17th tee to a new fairway on the north side of the water, and 380 yards long if the landing area in the fairway is used. But the OCM diagram also indicates a direct line to the green, located where the back tee for the current 18th hole sits. That bold approach might be 360 yards from tee to green, and could determine a match or two in the 2026 Presidents Cup. Lost in the arrangement is the current 17th hole, a par 3 that is on its third version since Packard concocted it in 1986.

The new **17th** hole replaces the classic south-to-north 17th – No. 13 since the 1986 rerouting – that saw Sam Snead, Ben Crenshaw and others come a cropper while chasing their U.S. Open dream. Instead, it will play diagonally across the water to the southeast, a maximum of 225 yards, but as short as 120 yards for youths and seniors from a tee on the same side of the creek as the green. With two bunkers in front, another back right and a bailout area front right, it could be a harrowing test, especially when the wind is blowing down the stream.

That brings us to the last. **The 18th** original hole is why Medinah No. 3 was rerouted in the first place, and now, Ogilvy, Cocking and Mead use the majority of that original fairway corridor

– the portion ABC analyst and 1965 PGA champion Dave Marr said couldn't be reached from the tee except with a "dive slice," for the second half of a 500-yard par-5 finisher that starts on the south side of Lake Kadajah. A 300-plus yard drive will mean avoiding a trio of bunkers on the right side of the fairway. Sliding the shot left and short means either splashing into a large bunker or tangling with several of Medinah's thousands of trees.

A par-5 finish brings into play the possibility of an eagle 3 winning a championship. Birdies should be plentiful.

As has been the case with both the original and current 18th greens, the new green, with a pair of bunkers on the right, will be adjacent to the 150-foot flagpole that remains where it has been since it was installed in the 1920s. Some things at Medinah never change.

Unlike the hole the USGA disfavored, the new green will have plenty of room for grandstands, corporate tents, and all the other trappings of modern spectator golf.

The back nine will play as long as 3,745 yards, compared to the current maximum of 3,803, and the course will measure to as much as 7,695 yards for masochists. It maxed out at 7,613 yards on paper in the 2019 BMW Championship, but the longest actual yardage was 7,504 yards on Saturday, when Thomas registered his 61.

The first 12 holes, while not rerouted, will not be untouched. The OCM trio has, at least electronically, gone over every inch of the course. The par-4 **first** remains about 445 yards, but the green will be rotated on a front right-back left axis, with two bunkers on the left side of the green rather than one on each side.

The **second** hole, the only over-water par-3

playing essentially as it has, will stretch to 205 yards from the 192 yards listed for the 2019 BMW Championship, with a new championship tee to the left and behind the present tee complex, almost behind the tennis courts.

The par-4 **third** hole will run 425 yards at the maximum, up from 412 in 2019, with a rebunkered fairway and three bunkers around the green – one of them with a grass island – up from the current two.

The par-4 **fourth** hole, one of Medinah's classics, will remain an uphill test to the northeast, and 485 yards from the championship tee, up from 463, with with a string of bunkers along the right side as you approach the green.

The par-5 **fifth** hole remains about 535 yards, but with a new, smaller green, plus new bunkering and what appears to be a runoff area to the right.

The par-4 **sixth** hole, which runs almost all the way to Lake Street, is still a brutal test, though maxing out at 495 yards rather than the current 509.

The change on No. 6 allows some room for a new back tee on **No. 7**, a par-5 that will stretch from the current 617 yards to a whopping 655. Some bunkers will be moved and most of the green will be surrounded by a closely-mown runoff, compared to the current three bunkers and rough.

No. 8 remains a par-3 of a bit over 200 yards with the tee tucked in a grove of trees and the green in relatively open space, at least for Medinah. The green will be reshaped to create a difficult back-right pin.

The par-4 **ninth**, which has always seemed jammed into the landscape, gets a bit of room to breathe, expanded to about 490 yards from the



Rendering: OCM Golf / Harris | Kalinka

NEW 13TH HOLE The 13th, first of the new holes, will run along the creek, featuring jagged-edge bunkers.

tips compared to the current 447, with a bit more pronounced dogleg left, a dangerous new bunker for short approachers, and a new green and bunker complex.

That puts the par-36 front nine at 3,950 yards from the championship tees (compared to 3,810 for the 2019 BMW), and 3,610 (silver), 3,335 (white), and 2,900 (green) from forward tees.

The par-5 **10th**, that excursion alongside busy Lake Street, is still a chore, now 590 yards from the tips rather than 578, and with enough bunkers speckled about to resemble a golfer's minefield,

including one with a grass island to the front right of the new green.

The par-4 **11th**, currently a 440-yard dogleg, is shortened to 390 yards, though the new back tee is almost on Lake Street. The difference comes from moving the green south to make room for the new ninth tee adjacent to the halfway house. A liberal application of bunkers to the corner of the dogleg will prevent most poachers from trying to cut the corner from shorter tees.

The par-4 **12th** remains what USGA rules guru P.J. Boatwright called "an all-American

A short history of changes to Medinah No. 3

1924: December, club commissions Tom Bendelow and American Park Builders to build third course

1928: September 23, course opens on property surrounding unavailable Medinah Forest subdivision grounds

1932: July 19, with Medinah Forest land available, major redesign opens, 8 new holes conforming to Bendelow's original plan

1969: course revisions by Larry Packard, including on the 18th hole

1986: extensive rerouting, 3 new holes (14th, 17th, 18th), by Roger Packard

1998: revisions, new 17th green away from shore of Lake Kadijah, by Roger Rulewich

2004: extensive revisions, including new shoreside 17th green similar to 1986 redesign, by Rees Jones

2009: extensive revisions, including new 15th hole, greens rebuilt on holes not previously rebuilt, by Rees Jones

2020: December, plans revealed for revision plan by OCM Golf including Geoff Ogilvy, Mike Cocking and Ashley Mead

2021: December 18, members approve OCM Golf plans for renovation including several new holes on the back nine and elimination of the original par-3 13th and 17th; construction to start in 2022, course to reopen 2024

hole," lengthened to 505 yards from the current 476, but retaining the fairway sloped like a turn at Daytona and with the green perched atop a hill-ock with a long, dangerous slope to a pond 30 feet below the surface.

Then, after all the tweaking, comes the new portion of No. 3.

Adjacent to the 16th and 18th holes, on the property used by the previous 18th and a long-ago ski jump and toboggan slide, OCM has designed a five-hole short course. The Camel Trail, as it will be called, is part of a trend toward adding pitch-and-putt layouts, such as the Cradle at the Pinehurst Resort in North Carolina. That will

give Medinah 59 holes in all.

It should be noted that because of the COVID-19 pandemic, OCM did all the basic design work from their office in Melbourne. Yet they note the real work is done in the field.

"Construction and shaping are just natural extensions of the design process," the OCM website states.

"Too often they're regarded as separate endeavours, but we figured out long ago that the best results came when we spent a lot of time in the field, working to refine the hole as it comes out of the ground. We spend countless hours pushing dirt around, refining and shaping until we

feel we've achieved the best outcome.

"This is a throwback to the early days of golf course design, when architects would prepare a routing and provide instructions in the field on the finer details, rather than documenting them with drawings.

"Today, while we can provide detailed plans, our preference is to use concepts and work to refine them in the field, always allowing for room to make adjustments. The goal should always be to make the holes better, not just replicating the plan, and we typically keep making refinements right up until the time of seeding."

In other words, stay tuned.