**Course Designer’s Notes – Sleeping Bear Downs**

Intro. This course was started almost ten years ago. I’ve poured countless hours into its design, and while I’ll never say never, sadly, it will likely be my last original design. The inspiration for this course was twofold. First, I wanted to make a sister course to Sleeping Bear National. Something that wasn’t nearly as demanding and difficult. Something that was fun. Something that was quirky and a course golfers would want to return to play multiple times. The second bit of inspiration was from the design work of CB MacDonald and Seth Raynor. I find their work fascinating. I’ve had the chance to play a few “MacRaynor’s” including Yale Golf Club, Sleepy Hollow C.C. and Yeamans Hall. I find their use of template holes interesting and appealing. While the templates provide a basic format for a hole, the interpretations are different and varied. The Biarritz at Yale is dissimilar in look, feel and playing characteristics from the Biarritz at Yeamans. And, the short hole at Yeamans is quite different from the short at Sleepy Hollow. That kind of fun quirkiness is what I wanted to include at Sleeping Bear Downs. I hope I accomplished it, and I hope you enjoy playing the course and return for many rounds as you strive to unravel the puzzle that is SBD. As an aside, the course also features holes that take their characteristics from certain other Golden Age architects, including Donald Ross, Alister MacKenzie and features from H.S. Colt and George Crump’s masterpiece, Pine Valley.

Hole 1 - Plateau: The course starts out with a relatively short par 4 that plays into the prevailing wind that comes off Lake Michigan from the southwest. There are multiple principal’s nose bunkers on the first (a nod to the principal’s nose bunker complex found at the Old Course at St. Andrews). The further left you go, the better look you’ll have at the green complex on approach. However, the better angle is down the right of the fairway, which may lead to a blind approach. The green is small and severe, and slopes from back to front and right to left. Any approach that flirts with the left side of the green is in danger of riding the slope on the left down 10-12 feet below the green. A par at the first is always a good score.

Hole 2 – Short: At the second is where we find the first MacRaynor template hole, the Short. This template par 3 is characterized by its relatively short yardage, a green site that is nearly surrounded by sand and, its dominant feature, a thumbprint green. It literally appears that a mythical giant pressed his thumb into the center of the green. At some short holes, like the 16th at Sleepy Hollow, the thumbprint is more prominent and noticeable than others. At SBD, the thumbprint is relatively subtle. But, any putt from the back half of the green should be mindful of the effect the thumbprint will have on the way the putt will react.

Hole 3 – Across: The third hole plays across and over a dune ridge (hence the hole’s name “Across”). A drive that successfully takes on the risk of the massive excavation bunker that runs down the left side of the hole, will be rewarded with the best view and angle for the approach into the green. The green moves from left to right and is crowned (a feature from many of the green sites at Donald Ross’s masterpiece Pinehurst No. 2). There are also humps and rises in the green that can be used to funnel approach shots towards the pin locations. The fact that the optimal line to the hole may not be a straight line, is one of the dominant features of SBD. Something that should be kept in mind on all approach shots.

Hole 4 – Boom-A-Rang: The fourth hole starts out with a blind tee shot over a massive dune. The best landing area off the tee is often dictated by where the pin is located on the boom-a-rang green. If the pin is back left, the best angle is to hit a drive down the right side. Conversely, if the pin is at the front of the boom-a-rang, the best approach is from the left side of the fairway. When the hole is cut in the back portion of the green site, a slinging hook from right to left is the shot shape that will get the ball closest to the pin. When the pin is up, look to use the slopes of the green to feed the ball to the hole. This green site takes its inspiration from the 7th green at Alister MacKenzie’s gem Crystal Downs CC (a real life course that sits in the same area of Michigan as SBD).

Hole 5 – Double Plateau: The fifth is the second MacRaynor template hole on the course. The hole gets its name from a green site that has two distinct raised plateaus. Again, you’ll find a generously wide fairway, but the golfer should be mindful of the side of the fairway that is likely to provide the best angle of attack depending on the pin location. Another feature of the 5th is a fairway bunker complex that is again inspired by Crystal Downs CC, the “three sisters” bunker complex which is found at the 5th hole at Crystal. The sisters should be avoided at all costs if the golfer wants to have any chance at hitting the green site in regulation at the fifth.

Hole 6 – Quarry: We now come to SBD’s first par five. The 6th hole plays over some of the most dramatic terrain at SBD including an old quarry which is down the left and should be avoided off the tee. The 6th can be reached in two, but it will take a heroic 3-wood from the correct position in the fairway. Depending on the strength of the prevailing tailwind, the green can be reached in two from either the left-side fairway route, or the right-side route. The green is perched on the side of a dune ridge and is severe. Often times the best approach into this green is to use the side boards along the right of the green complex. The 6th will not yield many eagles, however if played strategically, a birdie is certainly attainable.

Hole 7 – Biarritz: The 7th is the third MacRaynor template at SBD, the famous Biarritz template. A Biarritz’s dominant feature is a large swale that bisects the green site. One oddity is that in some of the real life Biarritz MacRaynor templates, the swale is actually in front of the green, while in others the swale is in the middle of the green. At SBD the swale is in the middle and for front pin positions should be avoided at all costs. For back pin positions, the swale must be navigated to have any chance at keeping the ball near the pin as any shot that flies the swale will bound off the green (i.e., keep your tee shot short of the swale and ride it up to the back pins or into the upslope at the back of the swale).

Hole 8 – Road: We now arrive at the fourth MacRaynor template, the Road hole. This template takes its features from the 17th hole at St. Andrews. As most know, there are three dominant features of the road hole. The first is a blind tee shot to a fairway angled from left to right. At St. Andrews a replica of the old railroad shed blocks the view of the fairway. While at SBD, a large sand dune blocks most of the view of the fairway. The second dominant feature of a road template is the green site which features a replica of St. Andrew’s famous road hole bunker. This bunker is deep, unforgiving and should be avoided at all costs. The third is a difficult recovery area behind the green. At St. Andrews it is an old road and wall beyond the green. At SBD, a deep bunker replicates the difficult recovery area and should be averted.

Hole 9 – Long: The second par five at SBD, the 9th hole, plays uphill off the tee and then back down to another of the most severe green sites on the course. While its yardage makes it the longest hole at SBD, it is reachable in two because of the front to back slope of its green complex. Any approach that clears the dune ridge in front of the green can use the slope to then feed the ball down to the pin locations. However, because of the severity of the green, reaching it in two does not guarantee an eagle or even a birdie as a three putt is most definitely in play.

Hole 10 – Dual: The back nine at SBD starts with a drivable par four that also includes dual green sites (hence the hole’s name and a feature found at the 8th and 9th holes at Pine Valley). The two green sites are drastically different. The right side green site sits nearly 20 feet above the level of the left side green site. Because of that elevation difference, the right side green site is more difficult to reach off the tee. Conversely, the lower left side green is easier to drive off the tee. The areas around both green sites can be penal and both greens are no easy two-putt. To avoid those difficult areas, another option is to hit a long iron into the fairway off the tee to leave the golfer with a short approach to the pin locations.

Hole 11 – Eden: The 11th hole is SBD’s fifth template hole, the Eden par three. This template derives its characteristics from the 11th hole at the Old Course at St. Andrews. The Eden’s predominate features are deep green side bunkers, a difficult to reach back tier and two false fronts. All in all, the Eden is one of the best par three designs in all of golf, possibly challenging the Redan for top spot.

Hole 12 – Maiden: We now come to the sixth MacRaynor template, the Maiden. Seth Raynor used the Maiden template at several of his designs. The main feature is a green site that contains two plateaus with a swale dissecting each plateau. The Maiden green site is essentially a Biarritz that has been turned sideways. However, while the Biarritz is a par three template, the Maiden is used by Raynor on par fours and par fives. At SBD, this Maiden is a reachable par five. Off the tee, the golfer is tempted to power drive down the left side of the hole. Taking that route could leave a relatively easy second into the green, however, massive bunkers and difficult terrain must be cleared to reach the left side landing spot. Then, once the golfer reaches the green, a three putt is most definitely in play if the player is not on the correct plateau.

Hole 13 – Punchbowl: Welcome to SBD’s seventh MacRaynor template hole, the Punchbowl. Obviously, the punchbowl shape of the entire green site is the main feature of this template. However, another characteristic of many of the MacRaynor Punchbowls is a blind approach into the green. At many of the Punchbowls found in the real world (such as the ones at Fishers Island and Sleepy Hollow), a large flagpole is placed behind the green as an aiming point for the blind approach. At SBD, the golfer gets no such help. However, if a power drive is executed, a 300-yard drive to the top of the dune above the green will afford the golfer a clear view down into the bowl. Every approach should take into consideration the shape of the Punchbowl and use its features to feed the approach down to the various pin locations.

Hole 14 – Fork: The 14th at SBD is aptly named Fork, as the golfer is presented a “fork-in-the-road” decision off the tee and must select his route to take on this testy par five. Regardless of the route taken off the tee, any attempt to hit this green in two must take into consideration the shape and severe left to right slant of the green complex. If reached in two, the challenge does not end there as this may be the most severe green on the course. A three-putt or completely putting the ball off this green are pitfalls that are most certainly in play.

Hole 15 – Redan: We now reach the eighth MacRaynor template at SBD, the Redan. Perhaps the most copied template par three in golf, the Redan is patterned after the 15th hole at North Berwick Golf Club in Scotland. The primary feature of the Redan is a green site that is at a near 45-degree angle from front right to back left, sloping down and away in the same direction. The strategic golfer will use a right to left shot shape that rides the green’s contours down to the back left pin locations. Depending on wind and the firmness of the green, firing directly at the flag will usually result in a ball through the green and into the back bunker.

Hole 16 – Peconic: Named after the 17th at the National Golf Links of America on Long Island, the 16th at SBD is a Leven hole and the ninth and final MacRaynor template on the course. The Leven features a decision off the tee. Take on the forced carry down the left side (which is nearly a 300-yard carry off the back tee) or go down the easier righthand route to an extremely wide fairway. Executing the drive that clears the forced carry down the left will result in the best approach into a green that is angled from front right to back left. This green site also slopes severely from front right to back left. An approach from the right side of the fairway will leave a difficult angle to a green sloping away from the golfer. Again, executing the strategic route will result in the best chance at a birdie on the MacRaynor Leven.

Hole 17 – Infinity: While not technically a template hole, the use of infinity green sites is something that is found at MacRaynor courses (including the 11th at Fishers Island and the 5th at Sleepy Hollow). On the 17th at SBD, the golfer’s tee shot is semi-blind over a dune ridge down to a valley protected by fairway bunkers down the lefthand side. The approach is then back up the next dune ridge to a green high above with a pin that looks like there’s nothing but an infinite expanse behind it. Once up to the green site, enjoy the views, they are some of the best at SBD. But don’t get too distracted as the green is challenging.

Hole 18 – Home: The home hole at SBD is a tough one. A long par four with a bunker in the middle of the fairway about 285 yards out from the back tees. The bunker should be avoided at all costs as holding the green from that position is next to impossible. There is ample room off the tee down the left side of the fairway. However, approach shots from that side are slightly more difficult as the green slopes from left to right. A par at the last is a respectable score before you retire to SBD’s massive clubhouse for your favorite beverage as you watch the sun set into Lake Michigan.

I hope you enjoy your round at Sleeping Bear Downs as you tangle with some of MacRaynor’s most famous templates. Have fun solving the puzzle!!

All the best,

Jeff