

The New Naples Lakes

Arnold Palmer's Last Hurrah



▲ *Standing on the first tee I could already see differences in the new design from the old course.*

Naples Lakes is the only Arnold Palmer Signature Course in Collier County and was the last course renovation reviewed by Arnold Palmer before his passing. The course was recently nominated for Golf Digest's 2018 Renovation of the Year Award. I was lucky enough to get an invitation to go and play this course from Jake Myers, Head Golf Professional, and Bryan Roe, General Manager.

I jumped at the opportunity and with my good golf buddy, Kent, headed for what I was hoping would be a special round of golf on a special golf course. I was right about one thing. It truly is a special golf course. With six sets of tees, plus combinations, the course can be played by just

about any level of golfer. As the morning fog gave way to blue skies, we decided it would be best to play from about 6,000 yards, take our time and enjoy the day.

Standing on the first tee I could already see differences in the course from before. The contrast of the green fairway against the brown waste areas in front of the tee and down the left side of the fairway was a new feature and a beautiful way to start off a round. There was also a large, deep waste bunker hidden from your view about 200 yards out on the right. At just 350 yards, the hole is a good opener, not too long with plenty of landing area off the tee. There is a giant sand trap on the left side of the fairway which ▶

becomes a great target for your drive. Preferable club off the tee would probably be a 3-wood for long hitters to protect from ending up the bunker.

The new greens are the most striking feature of the golf course design. Large undulations along with subtle contours not only enhance the beauty of the course, but make for some interesting pin placements. The first green is protected by a large, deep bunker on the left and right sides. The green is noticeably bigger from your approach shot vantage point and the large target makes hitting the green in regulation an easy task. Once on the surface, the real fun begins...putting. You better learn to read greens if you want to be able to score on this tract! Arnold Palmer courses usually boast large greens with lots of breaks, and these greens did not disappoint.

The second tee sits between two lakes and is framed by high pampas grasses and a brown sand cart path. A decent length hole at 381 yards, it is pretty much dead straight. The brown sand meanders its way down the left side of the hole and you can see three white bunkers off in the distance on the right. The lakes are not really in play, but make for a wonderful setting and act as a buffer between golf course and homes. Arnold always did a good job of keeping the development away from the course. The homes still have beautiful golf views, but you never feel claustrophobic. Hit a long straight tee ball, like Kent does, and you should have no more than about 140-130 yards into another beautifully shaped, undulating green. Par was not an issue for him.

The third hole was always one of my favorites and the new design enhancements have made it even better. The large lake to the left of the tee extends out towards another brown waste area. The mounding on the left side of the fairway beckons to you to hit a gentle fade over the sand, letting it run out toward the middle of the fairway. Big trees and preserve areas lay in wait down the right side. This wonderfully designed par 5 is a risk/reward hole for the big hitters. I prefer reward over risk so after my aforementioned tee shot, I was not going to attempt to get home in two. ▶



▲ This picture of the 8th green will give you an idea of the typical size and undulations on the course.

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◀ The 2nd tee box is framed by brown sand and pampas grass as you gaze out toward the green 381 yards in the distance.

knows, maybe you will roll in a snake for a birdie!

My apologies to Arnold, but number four was never one of my favorite holes. There is nothing wrong with it visually, actually it is a very pretty par four. I guess I am just not a fan. At 290 yards, the hole is too long to go for it and too short to hit much more than a 6-iron off the tee. From the tee you can see the dips in the fairway, the big lake to the left that also lies between you and the island green and the wooden bridge in the distance. Once you arrive at your tee ball, you are looking at about a pitching wedge or gap wedge into the green. If the pin is in the front, you are best to go for the middle of the green which slopes dramatically from back to front. The lone sand trap on the left should not come into play. The hole is very pretty, with the rock faced green and the wooden bridge cross over from fairway to green, just not my cup of tea.

Arriving at my tee shot, the green is barely visible as it is tucked away on the other side of the natural habitat area. The perfect play is to aim for the lone bunker straight out. You can hit anything from a hybrid to a mid iron and still be only 120 to 100 yards out with a full view of the green. Arriving at my layup resting comfortably in the fairway, I now have a full view of the green. Elongated left to right with a

rock wall running across the width of the front separating the green from the preserve. There are no sand traps surrounding this green, but I think I remember that there used to be one.

Nice little wedge to the middle of the green. Don't go pin hunting to a far right pin placement or you could be in big trouble. Just take what the hole will give you and be happy with a par. Who

Now the first par three is another story. A beautiful hole and a real tester. Nothing but waste area between the tee and the large sand trap that serves as the front part of the green complex. Waste bunker/cart path to the left of the green and two more sand traps to the right of the green. From the tee, the green appears to run a wide expanse ▶

from the sand traps on the right to the waste bunker on the left. Arriving at the green, we realized the green was actually not near as wide as we expected and both of our tee shots were actually on a little grassy knoll about pin high. With the back left pin placement, we were both able to get up and down for par. Nice hole!

The sixth hole is a winding, double dogleg par five the requires one to think before they hit. The huge lake to the left of the tee box also cuts in enough to make you hit your shot over it, which is more of a mental thing and should not be an issue. What you don't realize, standing on the tee box, is that the lake winds around the left side of the fairway and then cuts back in towards the middle of the fairway. Do not hit a long drive down the left side, even though it looks like the safest route, or you will be sorry.

Again the brown sand cart path runs along side the tee and becomes a larger waste area out on the right side of the fairway. The view from the tee is stunning. A big mound runs across the middle of the fairway spattered with brown sand bunkers. Your tee shot should be aimed directly at this feature. You will not be able to reach them off the tee. Your second shot needs to favor the right side, over the bunker complex and onto the plateau in front of the wooded area. Pick you club carefully to stay short of the woods. The brave one could have a shot at getting home in two by hitting a fairway wood down the left side and cutting it back into the ➤



The view from the sixth tee is magnificent!

green. Not an easy thing to accomplish and I would recommend against it.

I hit a hybrid short of the woods and was left with a gap wedge into the green which is nestled back among the trees. The lone sand trap on the right of the

green enhances the beauty of the setting, but should not be a problem. I would like to emphasize again that the greens are a major part of the golf course, even if I am not describing each undulation. All of the greens are in pristine condition ➤



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◀ *The seventh hole is a wonderful little par 3 measuring just 122 yards.*

way to score double boogie or worse. The green is elongated from left to right and is low in the front and high in the back portion. Kent hit a beautiful shot into the middle of the green, which I chose the bailout. We both ended with the same score, par.

Number 8 is another one of those risk/reward holes off the tee. A large sweeping dogleg right along the lake the runs all the way from tee to the rocks that frame the front of the green. Straight away are a series of bunkers. The far left one was the resting place for my tee shot. One is pretty much in the middle of the fairway and the other is at the back of the fairway before it drops off drastically. Kent took the risk and cut the corner perfectly. His reward was being in the center of the fairway looking at a short iron into this extra large green. There is a long bunker on the right of the green above the water and another to the short right side. Again, I wish I could adequately explain the sheer

and putt true, but the undulations and breaks are something that will take awhile for people to master.

The seventh hole is a wonderful little par 3 measuring just 122 yards. From the elevated tee box you look down across an expanse of natural waste area to the rocks separating it from the green. There is a large bailout area to the right of the green, which is the best place to miss. White sand bunkers surround the right portion of the green and make trying to go for a back pin placement a harrowing experience. The back bunkers look like a good

beauty of these large greens. This one caught my eye and I took a few photos to try and show it through pictures (See Page 29).

The finishing hole on the front side is a longer, 385 yard, par 4 that plays uphill. The tee shot is over a lake to a fairly wide landing area. The lake runs across the fairway and also down the right side. This is not the place to hit a big fade unless you aim well left. The massive bunker in the distance is your target. An uphill second shot always seems to be into the wind and requires at least one ▶

additional club. The lake cuts in a little from the right and there is a lone bunker to the right of the green. The back of the green is framed with trees and natural habitat.

I would like to take this opportunity to say how cordial and efficient the rangers were on the golf course. Because we were just a twosome, it might have seemed to them that we were being held up. But the fact is, they kept people moving and were always stopping to ask us how we were enjoying our round, making sure that we were not feeling as if it was slow going. We did not. We were enjoying conversation and the surroundings. It was a beautiful day and we were on a beautiful golf course. What could be better!

Number ten is pretty much how I remember it. Lovely setting from the tee box. The tees are separated by large areas of pampers grass, flowers and natural areas. A wooden bridge connects the front tees with the back tees. The fairway is framed on the right by tall pines and down the left are palms and more natural habitat. Naples Lakes is

designated as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, one of only 114 in Florida, and you can see why.

The fairway of the tenth hole has a tinge of a dogleg right and the only bunkers are the ones around the elevated green. Wide open landing area and a good drive on this 370 yard par 4 should leave you with an 8 or 9 iron. Beware of the false front on the green.

In contrast to number 10, the eleventh hole has been changed dramatically. A 457 yard par 5 which is reachable

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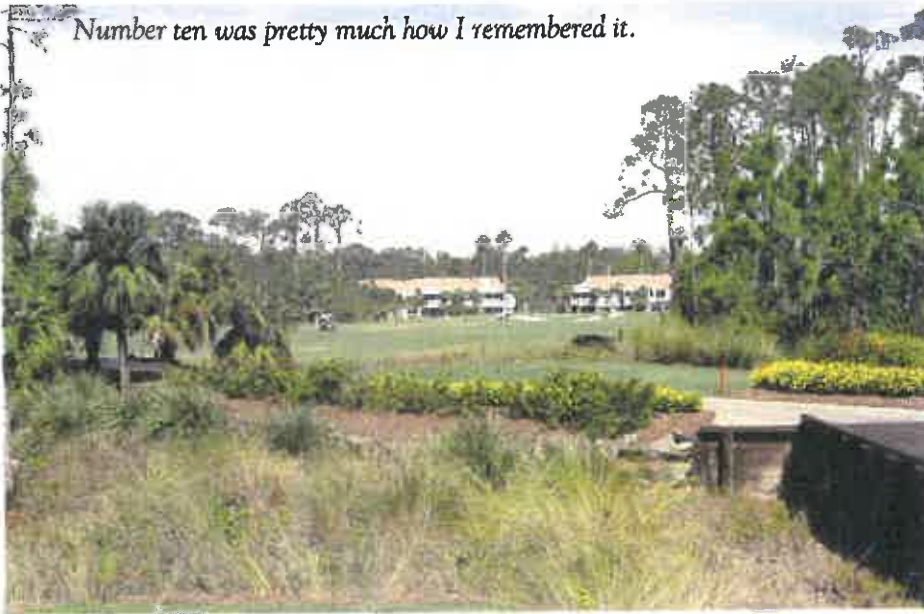
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Number ten was pretty much how I remembered it.



in two has had the lake on the right enlarged dramatically. The trees still line the left side of the hole. The cart path has been replaced with a brown sand waste bunker running down the left between the trees and the fairway. The second shot used to have to contend with a massive bunker that ran the entire width of the fairway preventing you from running up and fairway wood to get home in two. That is gone and now the hole has a little touch of a dogleg left at the end with the back party of the green being elevated and the front part of the green being about 10 feet below that. The green is massive! There is a bunker well front and to the left of the green and a bunker right in the middle where the green tiers. The gap between those bunkers was where the pin was positioned and made for a perfect target. Almost on in two, but still unable to sink my birdie putt.

At just under 400 yards, number twelve is one of the longer par 4's on the back. Lake far right is more for a buffer than an integral part of the hole. Trees line the



left side of the fairway and a large waste bunker looms in the distance on the left. The landing area to the right of this waste area and to the left of the lake is quite wide. Hit a good tee shot down the left side and you should be able to carry the bunker, leaving you a much shorter approach shot than the other route.

The green is high on the left, dips and flattens slightly as it goes right and eventually falls off toward the left bunker. If the pin is on the right side of the green, it is possible to hit to the middle of the green and have it filter towards the pin. Good hole requiring accuracy both from the tee and from the fairway.

Thirteen is another strikingly beautiful par 3. Only 144 yards and a little downhill. Tee, natural area, sand, green...that is the progression of your shot. I believe the sand traps in front were greatly reduced in size and the green has been sloped and elongated. With the pin on the lower level, Kent hit a perfect shot to the middle of the ▶

▶ *The thirteenth hole is a magnificent little par 3.*

green and it filtered down to the pin, leaving him only about 4 feet for his birdie!

The fourteenth hole starts the home stretch. I always thought this was a great little hole at 352 yards. The tee shot comes out of a chute over the rocks backing the front tees. You can see a series of white bunkers directly in front of you. Don't be fooled by perception. The left trap is much farther out than it appears and the left trap is definitely reachable. If you hit a big drive you may be able to carry the right traps. Setting up an easy approach shot as the hole doglegs a little to the right. The green slopes off to the left front and also to the back right. Beware of hitting the ball long as the green slopes off down to the preserve behind. There are two well-positioned bunkers guarding the front and right of the green.

Number fifteen is the shortest of the par 3's at just 124 yards. The green is just over the natural waste area and there is a lone front trap guarding the back right pin placement. Do not go long into the far bunker which is barely visible from the tee. The green is framed by lots of tall trees in the background. Should be an easy par.

I know I said previously that I was not a fan of the under 300 yard par 4. Well, the sixteenth hole makes me take that back. This hole sets up as a great little test of your strategy. Long hitters can go for it all, over

the lake trying to stay just to the left of the large green side bunker. The large mounded slope of the green here would catch a high fade and filter the ball back down onto the green. A great little design. For those of us who are not sure we can carry a tee shot 270 yards, it is best to hit a hybrid or even a 3-wood

toward the fairway bunker at the crux of the dogleg. The bunkers long right of the green should really not come into play, but really add character to the hole. The green sits atop a rock face over the lake and the tall trees add to the beauty of this classic short par 4. ▶

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The majestic clubhouse overlooks the eighteenth.

Seventeen and Eighteen have always been two of my favorite finishing holes in Southwest Florida. Seventeen is a 400+ yard, par 4 requiring a decision on the tee. Dogleg left with a massive bunker in the left elbow. A big tee shot can carry the bunker ending up on the flat ground just shy of the deep natural waste area between the end of the fairway and the green. The safer shot is to aim straight out the fairway at the large palm tree and be satisfied with having to hit a longer iron into the green.

Lining up for your approach shot you get a stunning view of the rock faced green, the back white sand bunker and the palm tree groupings behind that. The left side of the green can serve as a backstop, filtering the well-positioned iron down to the right flat part of the green. The left side of the green slopes off drastically toward the preserve. This hole is a great test of your skills.

We have arrived at the eighteenth tee! What a view! The majestic clubhouse stands guard over the fairway straight away and the fairway trap, just over the lake beckons to your tee shot. How much do you think you can cut off? Kent hit a bomb, just to the right of the traps and clearing

the lake with room to spare. Thus cutting off a lot of the dogleg. This par 5 tempts you to go for it with a tee shot like that. But, here-in lies the problem. With the prevailing wind in your face and a plus 200 yard shot over water, are you willing to take the risk?

Hit an iron short of the water and you leave yourself with just a wedge into this massive, sloping green. The rock face is built up above the water and a sole, enormous bunker lies in the middle of a large mound directly behind the pin. You do not want to end up in that monster. Take the middle of the green and hope for a two-putt par. A perfect way to end your round!

I again would like to thank Jake Myers and Bryan Roe for affording us the wonderful opportunity to preview this remarkable new design. Arnold did himself proud and we will always have this Last Hurrah to remember him by. ENcompass readers should look forward to summer reciprocal season so that they may experience this course for themselves. This course will endure and surely become known as one of the finest in the Arnold Palmer Signature golf course portfolio. ■