



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Wil Koopmans blasts out of a deep trap at Angus Glen Golf Club in Unionville, where he is director of golf. The region has many challenging holes to break the spirit of many aspiring Mike Weirs.

Showdown on York's toughest golf holes

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

They're the curse or the jewel of the golf course.

On some, you're forced to hit a tee shot off an elevated deck or from a tee box without a view of the green.

The fairways offer up a sharp dog leg or are bordered with fescue or tall trees. There might be a creek meandering through.

If that's not enough, the green, which might be tiered, is closely guarded by sand traps or bordered by a huge pond.

Welcome to golf's toughest holes, York Region style.

This area offers a variety of public playing facilities, each with their fair share of challenging holes.

So what makes a hole nasty? It depends on who's swinging the club.

"It's an individual's perception," says Brad Selwood, a Sharon resident who enjoys time on the links when he's not coaching the Newmarket Hurricanes of the Provincial Junior A Hockey League.

"It's a psychological thing," said Chris McNeilly, a Markham resident who plays weekly on the region's public courses.

A lot depends on how you're hitting the ball that day. It might also depend if you've played that hole before. Even the presence of certain elements, like water, can scare some people.

An avid golfer during the off-season, Markham Waxers junior A hockey coach Russ Herrington agrees the toughest hole to play is in the eye of the golfer.

There are a lot of holes everyone finds challenging. It seems when you

go to a course there are holes where your partner can't score well on but you can and vice versa. It gets in your head as to what hole is tough to play," said the Aurora resident.

Playing about 120 rounds a year, Markham's Phil Jones says skill level is also a factor.

"For each individual, what they see as being a tough hole to play will be different because it depends on your level of ability," said the former CFL player with Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Edmonton.

The challenge presented to golfers begins the moment the ball is placed on the tee.

"Playing from the blue tees (in some instances, the ones furthest back) as compared with the white tees (in some instances, the ones second furthest back) can also make a difference," says Ev Spence, a retired Newmarket high school teacher.

The York Region Newspaper Group recently asked several golfers who play on public courses in the area which holes they think are toughest. All distances are measured from the back tees. Here's what they said.

Uplands Golf Club, Thornhill 46 Uplands, 905-889-3291

Earl Fritz, executive director of the Canadian Junior Golf Association and Richmond Hill resident, thinks the eighth hole, a 235-yard par three, is one of the meanest he's played.

Players hit from an elevated tee into a valley that has water running across and to the side of it and a green that is elevated 10 to 15 feet above the fairway.

If that's not enough, the green slopes to the left and has trees to its right.

"If you hit the ball to the left you're in the creek. And the greens are hard since it doesn't receive as much water. You've got to hit the

ball far and straight. It's a good test even for a pro," he said.

Angus Glen Golf Club, Unionville 10080 Kennedy Rd., 905-887-0090

Mike Gellard, a Markham resident and member of the Boston Bruins American Hockey League affiliate in Providence, thinks the first hole, a 475-yard par four, can provide a rude awakening.

"For a first hole you usually assume that it's an easy one to play and it will get you into a groove. But on this hole you play a long approach shot that goes over water and onto a small green and if the wind picks up like it did with me, it plays into how you do. And the fact that it's only the first hole."

Markham's Siva Sivabalasingham, whose son Gajan is one of the top junior linkster players in the world, said the par four, 420-yard 18th hole has given him and PGA pros fits.

A scenic hole which has golfers hitting off an elevated deck onto a fairway with a dog-leg left, the key is to begin with a tee shot that plays long and onto the fairway.

"You have to land it on the right side of the fairway," he says. "If you go on the left there's rough and water (a creek). That's what happened to Vijay Singh on his second shot in last year's Canadian Open where he had to take a drop on his second shot," Mr. Sivabalasingham recalled.

Richmond Hill Golf Club, Thornhill 8755 Bathurst St., 905-889-4653

For an 18th hole, the 495-yard, par five is one that differs from other finishing holes, notes Mr. Fritz.

What makes it different, Mr. Fritz notes, is that the fairways are split and both sides are narrow. As well, you're coming out of the valley and going uphill right from your tee shot. Water also comes into play as the Don River runs along side the first fairway.

"The 495 yards seems a lot longer than what it is," he says. "It's a tough hole for any calibre of golfer."

Shawneek Golf Club, Queensville Woodbine Avenue, 1-800-387-8885

Mr. Selwood thinks the 11th hole, a 512-yard, par five is one of the most challenging. It's a three-shot hole for sure," the former

Toronto Maple Leaf said.

A dog-leg left is compounded by a huge tree. If you're lucky you can get home with a long iron. If you don't hit the ball long, forget it," he said.

Ballantrae Golf and Country Club, Whitchurch-Stouffville Hwy. 48, 905-640-6333

Wyn Hughes, a Stouffville resident who plays at least once a week, thinks the ninth and 18th holes on the 6,824-yard, par 72 facility can pose problems for any golfer. The popular course opened three years ago.

Although the ninth hole is a 504-yard, par five and 18th, a 405-yard, par four, he said both are similar with fairways slanting towards water.

"You can hit a good drive but if you catch the fairway wrong it'll run into water."

As well, he notes both greens are tiered.

Parkview Golf Club, Markham 6402 Steeles Ave. E., 416-293-2833

On the 5,860-yard, par 71, scenic Valley course — there are two 18-hole layouts, at Parkview — Mr. Sivabalasingham thinks the second hole, a 590-yard par five in which players hit from an elevated tee, is intriguing.

"The green is a tough read, too. You have to keep the ball on the right hand side. If you go left you'll go into the trees and rough."

"And the green is elevated from left to right," he notes.

Markham Green Golf Club, Markham 120 Rouge Bank Dr., 905-294-6156

At the nine hole, 3,004-yard, par 35 facility that was once the IBM course, Mr. McNeilly says the second hole, a 489-yard, par five, can be intimidating.

The biggest factor, he said is the presence of the Rouge River, which can come into play on the first three shots.

"The presence of water seems to do something to people's brains," he said.

"You have to get off the tee first and have a solid second shot, to make your third shot your approach to the green."

Another tough hole is the sixth, a 363-yard par four, adds Jim Boylen, a Markham resident

who plays about once a week.

"You've got to get a good shot off the tee and onto the fairway, and then your second shot you've got to clear the river," he says.

Maples of Ballantrae, Ballantrae 14248 Hwy. 48, 905-640-6077

On the 18-hole, 6,715-yard, par 72 championship course, Mr. Boylen thinks the 15th hole, a 453-yard par four from the back tee, is the make or break hole.

"You can have a great game until you get to the 15th," he said.

What makes it tough, he said, is the dense forest bordering both sides of the narrow fairway.

"You need a straight tee shot and you've got to hope the wind doesn't get too strong. That plays into it as well," he said. "One errant tee shot and you're in trouble."

Want more fear? Behind the green is water.

St. Andrew's Valley Golf and Country Club Aurora, 905-727-7888

From his experiences on the 7,304-yard course, Mr. Herrington thinks the ninth hole, a 555-yard, par five is a challenge. With a name like Twister it's no wonder.

"It's kind of like a double dog leg left in the way it bends," he said.

"You can't hit a drive or use a wood off the tee since you run out of fairway at around 170 yards out."

"It's a hole where I would hit a seven iron off the tee, then a four iron on my next shot and then you're left with a five, six or seven iron to get on the green," he said.

Cardinal Golf Club, Newmarket 2740 Highway 9, 905-841-7378

On the west course, a 6,315-yard, par 71, Mr. Selwood thinks the 12th hole, a 399-yard par four (from the back tee) is demanding.

"There's no play to drive it. You almost have to hit an iron off the tee and if you spray it left or right you'll be in jail."

"There's a big tree off to the left and on the right there's a pond. And the landing area is narrow. I don't care who plays it, even if it's a pro, it's a tough hole."

The only way to play the hole is to hit long.

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