



New Beginnings

In the aftermath of Hurricane Ida, Bedens Brook brings its Dick Wilson design into the modern age | By Rebecca Corzo

Pictured: The newly renovated 16th green.



In early September 2021, Hurricane Ida made landfall in Louisiana and barreled north. High winds and torrential rains impacted homes, businesses and infrastructure as the system made its way through over a dozen states before dying out in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. New Jersey was one of the states hit hardest by the storm, and one of the many golf facilities that sustained significant damage was The Bedens Brook Club in Skillman.

Faced with an unfortunate situation, Bedens Brook decided to make the most of it. In 2015, the club had commissioned golf course architect Andrew Green to come up with a master plan for the course, and in the aftermath of the storm the club decided not just to clean up the

debris but to go all in on Green's plan, conducting a thorough renovation of its Dick Wilson golf course.

"The storm kind of jump started the project process," said James Bryson, Bedens Brook's superintendent. "That gave us an opportunity to have almost a blank canvas and to let Andrew come in here and prove to the membership what this place really could be."

Originally founded as The Princeton Golf and Tennis Club in the early '60s, The Bedens Brook Club has changed names several times over the years. Following the addition of the founding charter members, the club went on a search for a worthy architect. Wilson, who along with Robert Trent Jones, Sr. was considered the most prominent designer of the postwar period, was

hired for the project. The Skillman course would be among the last of the architect's works — he died in 1965 — a career that also included such highly regarded layouts as Deepdale and Meadow Brook on Long Island as well as Pine Tree Golf Club and Doral Resort's Blue Monster in Florida.

Around the summer of 1964, the club voted to change its name to The Bedens Brook Club.

As the decades passed, greens shrunk, hole locations became limited, and bunkers deteriorated. It was time for Bedens Brook to reexamine things. As soon as possible after the hurricane, the Bedens Brook team got underway.

Keeping in touch with the historic nature of Wilson's work while also transforming the club to its full

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potential were both important to the club. Green and his crew made sure to follow through with those intentions.

“Our renovation still has that Dick Wilson feel,” added Bryson. “Andrew [Green] does a really good job of making sure he uses the original architecture integrated in his design.”

Nevertheless, one thing that has changed since the 1960s is the relationship between contour and green speed; Bedens Brook hand-picked six greens on which to decrease the severity of the slopes. With that, the conditions will become more enjoyable and compatible with today's game.

“There were several greens where members were likely to three or

even four-putt, so we went in and softened the slopes there,” Bryson commented. “Greens aren't meant to be rolling much faster than a 12 regularly, and it takes the fun pin placements out of the picture when you get them too fast. We made it so that 40% of our greens that we rebuilt were pinnable. We were able to make more pin placements, which I would say is modernizing the game to today's standards.”

With the reconstruction of several greens, the options for hole locations became vast.

“Our 11th green had about an 8-foot area that the pin would be in every single day,” said Paul Poandl, the club's head golf professional. “With the new construction, we now have

25 hole locations on that green. In my 16 years at Bedens Brook, I never saw a hole location on the right side of that green. To see these new hole locations has been great, and the positive feedback from the members saying, ‘Wow, I've never putt at this spot before.’ They just want us to keep going and do the rest of the greens because of that.”

In the hope of avoiding future disruptions due to storms, the team also took those challenges into account. The club added capillary concrete liners underneath the bunkers to help with maintenance during and after major weather events.

“Whenever there's a big rainstorm, we don't have to go out there and push up sand anymore. Andrew does a really good job of making sure that water doesn't run into the bunkers, whereas back in the day, when they put in bunkers, they were used as collection systems — they would allow water to run into bunkers. Today, we don't want contamination in the sand.”

The second and fourth holes were

Below: The 9th and 18th holes at Bedens Brook.





Above: The 2nd hole; Right: The 10th hole.

completely renovated. Capillary concrete bunkers were placed, new bunker sand was allocated and new contours on the greens were created.

On hole No. 2, the green was raised almost four feet to help protect from future flood events. Irrigation from tee to green was also added.

"There's a big wall that was built behind it to help put the water around the green, which we've seen has worked significantly," Bryson said. "I've taken pictures during storms and now you can see the water going around the green."

While holes 2, 4, 10, 11 and 12 have had significant work done, they appear similar to what they used to look like — even to eyes that know the course well. Those holes now feature new bunkers, new white sand, better drainage, better irrigation and USGA spec greens with 12 inches of root zone underneath.

For holes 9 and 18, it's a different story.

"9 and 18 have evolved into an entirely new design, although [they are] very much in a Dick Wilson light," Poandl added.

Approximately 1000 square feet of putting surface have been restored to the renovated greens, bringing their dimensions back to the size that Bedens Brook believes Dick Wilson originally had them.

While that added square footage may seem intimidating, the effect has been the opposite. It's done wonders for pace of play at the club.

"Pace of play has improved slightly because the greens are challenging, but more fair," Poandl said.

It won't be long before the next 10 greens are modified as well.

"The rest of the greens aren't as severe," Bryson added. "We'll expand the edges of the greens, redo the



bunkering and install irrigation."

The feedback from the Bedens Brook membership has been stellar.

"Members are bringing more guests and that's been a direct result of this work," Poandl said. "We have also seen an increase in membership." 🌱