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GOLF

Bolton's International Club, America's longest golf course, is getting shortened

By **Steve Marantz** Globe correspondent, Updated March 24, 2021, 5:03 p.m.



Ben Crenshaw (shown at the Masters in 2014) has emotional ties to this area because of the 1999 Ryder Cup. ANDREW REDINGTON

As a cradle of American golf, Massachusetts helped shape course architecture — the design of tees, fairways, bunkers, and greens within natural landscape.

The Donald Ross Award for outstanding contributions to course architecture, awarded by

The Donald Ross Award for outstanding contributions to course architecture, awarded by the American Society of Golf Course Architects, is named for the icon who founded the society and worked out of Holyoke until his death in 1948. The late Geoffrey Cornish, a recipient of the award and past president of the society, was based in Amherst.

Now an architectural team with an emotional connection to Massachusetts golf history is slated to redesign one of the state's most famous courses.

That team, Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore, will redo the Pines Course of Bolton's International Club, known as the longest track in the United States at 8,325 yards. Crenshaw and Coore plan to cut 1,400 yards from the Pines at a time when long hitters overwhelm shorter tracks.

"There's a succinct line attributed to Donald Ross," Crenshaw said this week. "That 'golf should be a pleasure, not a penance.' I've always loved that phrase."

The International went into bankruptcy in 2020 and was acquired in February by Escalante Golf, a Texas-based firm that has 17 other courses. Escalante's \$10 million acquisition includes the International's two private 18-hole courses, Pines and Oaks, its nine-hole public course, Twin Springs, and about 600 acres. A renovation of Oaks will be carried out by architect Tripp Davis.

But it's the Pines renovation that will be front and center.

"Distance is on everybody's mind," Crenshaw said. "All I can tell you is that Bill and I want to envision the best possible golf course. We can change the direction of some of the holes to make it an interesting test of golf."

"Eight thousand yards is quite a lot, even in these days. Our job is to find the best holes we can on that piece of ground. Some holes will require length, but accuracy and delicacy will be in the mix as well."

Coore first walked the Pines in 2018, for the previous owner, and envisioned a different, shorter layout.

“We started out with no preconceptions,” said Coore. “But if the goal was to keep it as the longest course in America, we will have failed spectacularly.

“The more I walked the property, the more I realized how interesting it is, with its landforms, pines and other trees, and its loamy, sandy soil, well-drained. I realized that if some of the holes were rerouted, using intersecting corridors, and taking advantage of the vegetation, it could be a really interesting course.

“It’s not going to be like The Country Club, or Myopia, or Old Sandwich. The land offers an opportunity to do a distinctive course that will play like golf in New England.”

Coore and Crenshaw partnered in 1985, and while their portfolio reaches far and wide, until now it has included just one Massachusetts course, Old Sandwich in Plymouth.

The history of the International, and the Pines, has special meaning to Crenshaw. Opened in 1901 as a nine-hole course called Runaway Brook, it expanded in the 1950s into the Pines, designed by Cornish, with the help of the legendary Francis Ouimet.

Ouimet rose to fame as the underdog champion of the 1913 US Open at The Country Club in Brookline. Crenshaw, a polite, unassuming Texan whose PGA career included two Masters championships, captained the 1999 US Ryder Cup team that pulled off an improbable come-from-behind victory at The Country Club. That victory, highlighted by a 45-foot birdie putt by Justin Leonard, is seared into Crenshaw’s memory.

“When Justin made that putt — one of the most improbable putts ever hit — on the same hole that Francis Ouimet holed a putt in the 1913 Open, on the 71st hole, with Ouimet’s house across the street, I’ll never forget that,” said Crenshaw.



Justin Leonard erupts after his dramatic putt in the 1999 Ryder Cup. DOUG MILLS

After Cornish and Ouimet set the Pines's tips (or so-called "Tiger Tees") at 8,040 yards, the course soared to fame. Golf Digest ranked it among the country's top courses.

"The course is, in every respect, a thing of beauty," the Globe's Joe Concannon wrote in 1968. "In the distance, frequently within view, rises Mount Wachusett. The fairways meander through trees and bushes and over the gently rolling hills of Central Massachusetts."

The Pines was lengthened to 8,325 yards in a 1972 renovation by another icon, Robert

Trent Jones Sr., with the par-5 fifth hole at 715 yards. Then owned by the ITT Corporation, the International “serves primarily as a place where corporate officials can make hard business decisions,” the Globe’s Paul Harber wrote in 1993.

A retired ITT executive, Daniel P. Weadock, bought the International in 1999. Weadock patrolled the course in a cart he called the “chairman’s chariot,” stocked trout in a pond he fished, and fed fresh meat to foxes that roamed the property.

Under Weadock and general manager Brian Lynch, the International built a 12-acre practice area and brought in architect Tom Fazio to build another 18-hole course, Oaks, which opened in 2001. The International routinely hosted charity events, including one in 2004 in which broadcaster Sean McDonough honored his late father, legendary Globe scribe Will McDonough, with a plaque on the 16th hole of Oaks.

When Weadock died after a car accident in July 2005, ownership passed to his wife, Florence, and his son, Daniel Jr. In 2011, Oaks landed on Golfweek magazine’s list of top 10 Massachusetts courses the public could play. But under the new ownership, the International will be fully private, with membership costing \$30,000 for initiation and \$12,000 annual dues.

“We’ve had a tremendous response from former members, some who go back 35 to 40 years with the club,” said David Matheson, one of Escalante’s four partners. “We expect to have 125 to 150 members.”

Oaks will be renovated in 2021, while Pines is open for play, Matheson said. Both Oaks and Pines will be open in 2022, with the Pines renovation slated to begin in autumn of 2022. No plans have been announced for the nine-hole Twin Springs public course.

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