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King and Prince renovates Hampton Club

Scenic and splendid layout greatly enhanced

By Cindy Acree

The King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort is celebrating its 75th Anniversary this year. The famed resort, one of only a handful in Georgia to be recognized as a member of the Historic Hotels of America, is located on St. Simons Island, the state's largest barrier island.

As an anniversary gift to itself, and certainly to the golfers who have discovered it, the King and Prince recently completed a fabulous renovation of its King and Prince Golf Course at The Hampton Club. Just as the King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort is acclaimed for preserving its history, it preserved the natural beauty and design integrity in its \$3.6 million update.

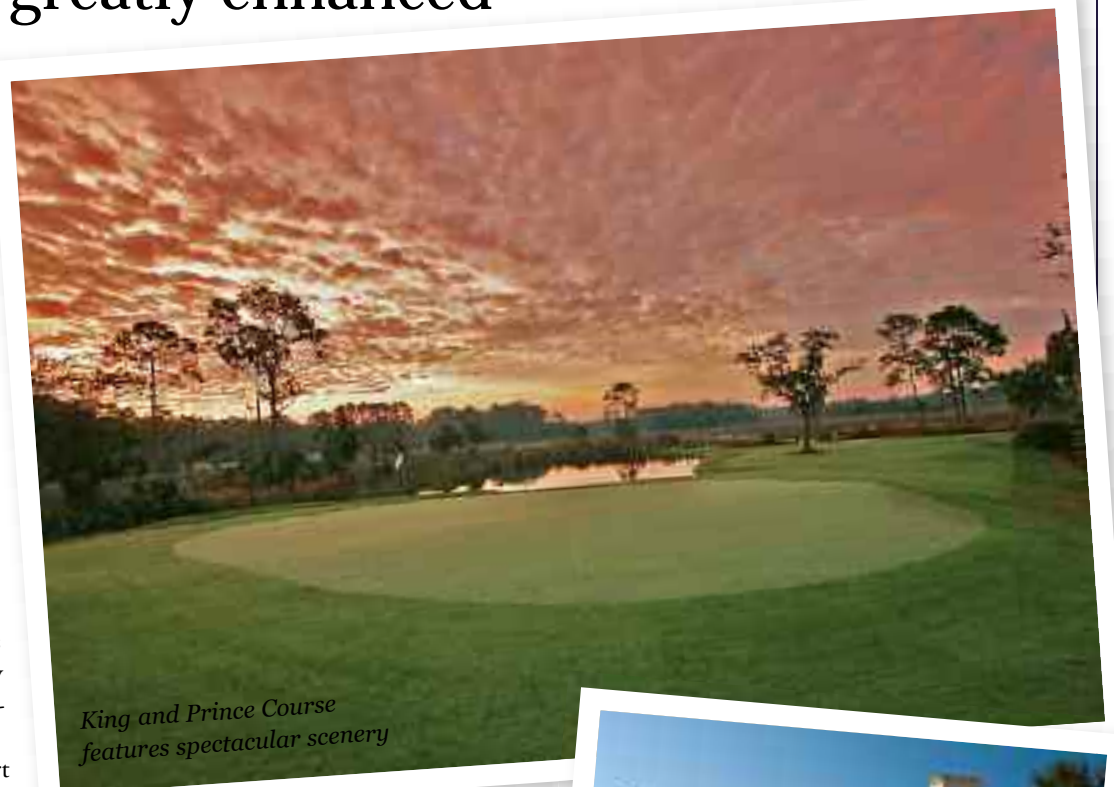
The King and Prince Golf Course is an adolescent compared to its historic namesake. The 20-year-old course is a gem, located on the northern tip of the island, but was ready for an update, largely due to vast improvements to turf care technology and grasses. Legendary architect Joe Lee designed the course, taking a beautiful piece of land with magnificent views and character, and then masterfully and naturally weaving a golf course into the landscape.

When the decision was made to renovate the course, one of the biggest

requirements was maintaining the masterpiece that Lee crafted. The club's ownership and management team has been in place since the course opened in 1989, so they were in a great position to know what preserving Lee's original design should look like. They hired Billy Fuller Golf Design and together they accomplished their goal.

Despite measuring only 6,462 yards from the back tees, the course was not lengthened, but a fifth set of tees were added. The new forward tees are 4,929 yards, approximately 300 yards shorter than the previous forward set of tees.

Don't let the relatively short yardage from the tips fool you. The back set, now known as Old Ironsides, has a slope rating of 140, and the traditional men's tees have a slope of 137, the same as the back tees before the renovation. The men's tees (formerly the whites, now the blues) have added just over 200 yards, and now measure 6,209 on the scorecard. The newest set of tees will help shorter hitters reach fairways or clear doglegs on tee shots.



King and Prince Course features spectacular scenery

A number of factors contribute to the disparity of length and difficulty. From day to day, the ocean breezes can change some shots by up to three club lengths, such as on the first island hole, the par-3 12th. Often, it is not such a good thing to

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King and Prince

[Continued from cover]

have honors on this hole, which barely exceeds 100 yards in length.

Golfers can easily get distracted by the awesome expanse of beauty of the start of these marsh-view island holes. Soon after, golfers are holding their breath as they wonder whether the tee shot that was just fired dead at the flagstick is even going to land on the green. A short shot will likely land in a greenside bunker or in the small pond, while over-clubbing will probably send your shot over the new greens complex into the marsh.

Keys to scoring are club selection and shot making at the King and Prince Course. Strategically placed bunkers, trees, doglegs and the wind make shot-making essential.

Because the renovation was largely done to replace obsolete construction, such as the irrigation system and greens complexes, many of the changes made to the golf course took place underground, and did not alter the natural beauty or original course design. The entire irrigation system was replaced and the upgraded technology in this new system has greatly enhanced the playability of the course, allowing superintendent Chuck Moore to better regulate watering and drainage.

The new irrigation system was critical to appreciating the full renovation. Not only were all greens complexes re-built with state of the art technology, but a number of new and varied grasses were added to the course.

The new greens are phenomenal and the same as those recently installed at Atlanta's famed East Lake Golf Club. While it seems desirable to use whatever grass East Lake used, Fuller had to be sure that St. Simons' warmer climate and salty coastal conditions could sustain these same turf grasses.

The re-shaped greens are a Mini-Verde ultra-dwarf Bermuda grass. Green collars were added and planted with Tifspart Bermuda, with tees, fairways, and rough sodded with Celebration Bermuda.

All the bunkers were changed and are now etched with Empire Zoysia. Without a doubt, the new bunkering is the most noticeable and notable change to the golf course. Bunkers were reshaped and in most



14th hole at King and Prince Course

cases made deeper and more severe, making for tougher shots to the green. These grasses, particularly the Zoysia outlined bunkers, have really enhanced the character of The King and Prince Course.

The driving range was also transformed into a true practice facility. The driving range and putting green have the same grasses as found on the course. Also added were a chipping green, fairway bunkers and shorter target greens. The practice facility was even mapped for GPS, with the King and Prince Golf Course now providing a great place to work on your game.

The course starts out with two straight-away par 4s of average length, although the second hole can play pretty long at just 375 yards because it faces the incoming breezes off the marsh. Both holes have fairway bunkers on the right with plenty of sand surrounding the greens.

After No. 2, golfers drive through Hampton Plantation on the way to the three marsh-side holes on the front side. The three holes also wrap around a good-sized brackish pond. The lengthy par-5 third hole faces directly into the marsh, and there is often a pretty strong breeze, coming off the marsh. The fifth hole, also a par 5, parallels the third in the opposite direction, with both playing fairly straight-away from the back tees and a bit right-to-left from the middle and forward tees. where drives require some shaping to avoid trees or bunkers.

At 193 yards, the fourth hole is the longest of the par 3s and requires an accurate tee shot to avoid a bunker that runs the length of the deep green on the left, with a grass bunker and water guarding the putting surface on the right.

Holes 6, 7 and 8 return to the interior of the course, with no water in play on any of the trio. The 8th is one of the longer par 4s

on the course, and forms a strong closing duo on the front nine with the 9th, the signature hole on the King & Prince Course. The 9th wraps around Butler Lake, with tee shots from the two back sets of tees having to carry water with their drives and approach shots.

The 9th is one of three holes that have added a significant amount of length from the men's tees, and now plays from the same tee as those playing from the tips. The lake hugs the left side of the fairway and must be carried on the approach shot, with anything short or left getting wet. Shorter hitters may have to play around the water to the right, while those playing from the senior or forward tees may have to lay up off the tee to avoid carrying the fairway, which turns sharply to the left for the second shot. Those who bail out a bit long and right on their approach shots may face a challenging bunker shot or chip across the green with the lake looming just off the edge of the putting surface.

The back nine starts with a medium length par 4 which requires a well-placed tee shot that also must carry Butler Lake. The dogleg right is bunkered and tree-lined down the right side, making the left side the preferred angle for the approach. The men's tees have added 35 yards to 366 on the scorecard.

The short 12th starts the four breathtaking marsh holes, which are connected to the mainland by a series of bridges that provide some splendid views of what you are about to experience. Lee discovered these islands while he was surveying Hampton Plantation for the course.

The par-4 13th is the third hole that has added considerable yardage from the blue tees, going from 315 to 386. It is now a real test, beginning with a tee set within the marsh, but a reasonably generous fairway eases the challenge somewhat.

Perhaps the most memorable hole on the course is the 14th, a serpentine par 5 that is easily within reach in two shots for those not averse at taking a risky line from the tee over the picturesque marsh and a row of trees. A pond down the right that forms the S-shaped fairway is in play for longer hitters, who face a decision whether to carry the water pretty much all the way to the green after a well-positioned drive. With the marsh on the left, the lay-up shot requires precise accuracy, and a potential three-club wind can make things even more interesting.

After the well-bunkered but otherwise tame par-3 15th, the course returns to the mainland, beginning with two of the tougher par 4s on the course. The 16th has added a new fairway bunker down the right side, with the left side remaining the preferred angle for the approach, which must carry a pond short and right of the green.



Upgraded practice facility

The 17th is the longest of the par 4s at 420 from the back tees, with a large tree at the corner of the slight dogleg right a formidable obstacle for shorter hitters. Some 150 trees were removed during the renovation, but the imposing one at the corner of the 17th remains.

Things ease up a bit on the par-5 finishing hole, although water down the right side that is in play on the second shot and a deceptive new bunker short of the green keep it from being too friendly a finale.

Overall, the King and Prince Golf Course is as inviting and fun as is St. Simons Island itself. The course renovation has enhanced its considerable beauty. It's a great place to play golf, whether it's just for one round during a coastal getaway or if you're lucky enough to call the King and Prince Golf Course and The Hampton Club your home club.

Rick Mattox is the club's long-time General Manager and Matt Evans is the Golf Professional.

For more information about the King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort and The Hampton Club, please visit www.kingandprince.com or www.hamptonclub.com or call (912) 634-0255. 📞