

The background of the cover is a photograph of a golf course. In the foreground, there is a calm body of water reflecting the sky and trees. A small, light-colored sand trap is visible on the green grass to the left of the center. In the middle ground, a white flag on a pole stands on a green. The background is filled with a dense line of tall, dark evergreen trees under a bright, hazy sky. The magazine title is printed in the upper right corner.

# tee to green

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*Ole Miss* Golf Course  
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# Ole Miss FACILITY RE-OPENING

## AFTER YEAR-LONG AND FULL RENOVATION

By John Price

Oxford, Miss., is listed as one of the most livable small communities in the United States each year and is the site of the first Presidential debate of 2008. But now it is also home to what some are saying could be one of the top public golf courses in the Magnolia State.

The Ole Miss Golf Course has been under the knife since January 2008 and is set to emerge with more than just a simple face lift.

Golf course architect Nathan Crace of Watermark Golf/Nathan Crace Design was retained to administer the course "surgery" and has announced that contractor Eagle Golf & Athletics has completed the work and the course is set to re-open this month.

"In our line of work, you'll often hear architects say that they have a great piece of property to work with and all that needs to be done is to 'find the course' on it," explains Crace. "That gets overused and if the process were that easy there would be no need for architects, but on this project we did have a great piece of land. This is beautiful and rolling wooded property and the existing course never took advantage of that setting until our renovations this year."

In addition to the complete re-design of all green complexes and bunkers, Crace was also tasked with designing a new course-wide irrigation system and new irrigation lake, re-grassing the fairways with hybrid Bermuda Grass, designing new fairway bunkers,

expanding the driving range tee, and developing a new concrete cart path routing for all 18 holes. The University also wanted to stretch out the course where possible to add some needed length while also making the course better for a growing number of ladies and senior golfers, so new back tees and forward tees were added on several holes.

"When we say this was a total course renovation, we mean it," continues Crace. "There were not too many areas of the course that didn't receive at least some degree of improvement and the extra effort by the university, the golf-course staff, and the contractor are



evident in the quality of the finished product."

This is the second time the university has turned to Crace to help them with work at Ole Miss Golf Course. In 2006, he was brought in to design a practice facility specifically for the men's and women's golf teams. That facility has drawn rave reviews and proved to be a

*continued on page 5*

valuable recruiting tool, so it was no surprise that Crace was selected from a short list of golf-course architects from across the country when the time came to renovate the course itself. Not bad considering Crace is also a graduate of Mississippi State University — a long time in-state rival of Ole Miss.

"Of course the school rivalry was never an issue for anyone on the project team and especially not for me," Crace says. "We would joke about it from time to time, especially when football season was just around the corner, but our main objective was to provide the best possible product for the funds invested by the university. I think everyone will agree that we succeeded in achieving that goal and in fact surpassed most expectations."

When golfers arrive at the course, the first changes to be seen will be the fourth, fifth, and sixth holes that run along the entrance road into the property.

Crace says those holes were designed to give the golfer a taste of what to expect throughout the course before they get to the parking lot. If it's true that you only get one chance to make a first impression, then golfers will be in love before they reach the first tee. A large new irrigation lake now frames the right side of the fourth fairway and protects the front and right of the new green. The previously existing ditch that crossed the landing area of the fourth fairway is gone, and a large bunker now guards the left side of the putting surface. The par-3 fifth hole features two new bunkers protecting the back left pin placement of the new rolling green and the following par-5 sixth hole is now a bona fide "risk-reward" hole. The sixth is just one of a number of holes that feature new fairway bunkers and the two that now juxtapose the landing area on this reachable par-5 create a double-dogleg effect that will be tempting to long hitters trying to get home in two, yet equally rewarding for the sensible golfer who takes a more strategic route to the green.

"When you drive in and see those three holes with the new greens and bunkers and the trees that frame the holes, it's exciting," says



golf course superintendent David Jumper. "I don't know how you couldn't get excited."

Crace has always had a love for dramatic short par-4 holes and his work at Ole Miss Golf Course is no different. He says that from the day the dirt began moving he had a special feeling about the 13th hole, a slightly dogleg left par-4 that plays along a ridge running parallel to the Oxford Airport and is subse-

quently exposed to constant wind. The green sits on a knob that extends from the end of that ridge and appears to be perched on the precipice of a sheer drop. From the tee, three bunkers guard the fairway and three more roll and tumble their way along the fairway to the green itself — making the temptation for long hitters to challenge the dogleg a tough decision on the tee.

Other featured changes include lengthening the par-5 14th hole and relocating that hole's green complex. Crace added new back tees and moved the green back and left — out of an existing valley that was prone to flooding — and benched it into the wooded hillside. The result is a green that is perched above a new lake on the right side in the old valley floor, dotted with two pot bunkers to keep golfers honest, and framed by a backdrop of hardwoods and pine straw beds that looks like a scene from a golf magazine.

The course now features a strong finishing stretch from Nos. 15-18, capped off by the short par-4 18th hole. In the past, the hilltop green perched high above the fairway caused frustration for approach shots that came up short — and rolled back down the hill, leaving a 100-yard shot (or more) back to the green.

Crace designed four new bunkers benched into the hillside at different elevations to help prevent that from happening now and keep long hitters honest off the tee. Not to say that a golfer would want a third shot from one of the bunkers ranging from 5-12 feet below the 8,000-square-foot putting surface, but the new 18th — like its 17 other brothers and sisters — now makes for some great theater on a previously undercapitalized piece of wooded property quietly tucked away in north Mississippi.