



NEATLY TUCKED AWAY in the southeastern corner of Vermont is the Brattleboro Country Club, a superb nine-hole test of any golfer's shotmaking ability. Rich in tradition, run by an extremely energetic staff and supported by a devoted core of members, this challenging layout eagerly awaits new visitors.

"It's the people that make the club special," head pro Jim Hart contended. "Everyone here is so friendly. We have a very active membership, and a lot of them have been here for many, many years. This is a great place to be."

Brattleboro officially opened in 1914, but the

CLUB PRO JIM HART HAS JUGGLED THE NEEDS OF MEMBERS, GUESTS AND TOURNAMENTS FOR MANY YEARS. Hubert Schriebl

initiative to build the golf course began much earlier. The Wantastiquet Golf Club, a six-hole course, was opened in Brattleboro in 1899. In the early 1900s, interest in a new invention, the automobile, diverted everyone's attention away from golf and led to the closing of the course.

Some influential Brattleboro residents still wanted their own golf course, so C. Menzies Miller and other local golf enthusiasts invited Tom McNamara, a well-known Boston-area golf pro, to Brattleboro in December of 1913 to survey some land for use as a golf course.

A tract of land that was located two miles northwest of the village on Dummerston Road and owned

by the Brattleboro Retreat was selected as a possible site. When McNamara plotted the course layout on a piece of paper, it represented the first step toward achieving this ambitious project.

In February of 1914, a formal meeting was held in the office of Clarke C. Fitts. This group voted to incorporate under the name of "Brattleboro Country Club." A committee was set up to finance the organization, and Colonel J. Gray Estey was chosen as the first president of the club.

After an agreement to lease the land from the Retreat was arranged, work started on the course in April 1914 under the direction of William P. Hannum, the first greenskeeper of the club. A house that existed on the property was made into the clubhouse. "It was just a pasture and some woods that was owned by the Brattleboro Retreat," recalled longtime club member Alan Sargeant.

On Wednesday, July 1, 1914, the clubhouse and grounds opened with a Japanese lawn celebration. More than 1,000 people visited the club that day. Golf and shooting traps were featured during the celebration, and both activities continued to be enjoyed throughout the early years of the club.

The yearly membership dues were \$25 for residents, plus a \$5 initiation fee. Non-residents were charged \$25 with no initiation fee. Women, who were not included in the initial price structure, were charged \$10 for a membership. A total of 325 members signed up for the nine-hole, 2,754-yard course. The course record for many years was 32, held by Joseph G. Estey.

With just nine holes, Brattleboro Country Club has not been the site of any major statewide tournaments. In 1932, however, an exhibition match

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was held that is still a major topic of conversation.

Francis Ouimet had won the second of his U.S. Amateur titles in September of 1931. The following spring he came to Brattleboro with Massachusetts pro Frank Bolger. They played an exhibition round of golf with club members George Zelenakas and Joe Estey. Zelenakas, who is now 90 years old and still an active member of the club, remembers that match well.

"That's a long story," he explained. "Joe and I were picked to play against them, but I don't know why they selected us. A lot of other club members could have played. We were honored to compete against them. We weren't nervous. I never got nervous back then. They won on the last hole, but I don't remember what we shot. It was great."

Zelenakas has been a part of the club since it opened. He was a caddy in the early years and a top player from then on. His reputation as an excellent golfer has carried over to present day. "Everyone is 10 to 20 years younger now and they won't give me any strokes," he said with a chuckle.

"George plays four or five times a week, and he still has that move down into the slot," said club pro Hart, moving his right elbow down to his hip.

The physical changes to the course over the years have followed the standard tee-and-green repositioning routine. With first-year superintendent Phil Rollins now in charge of the course, other changes are being made. "The greens committee kind of lets me do what I like," he said. "We have added a few things that have involved

a lot of tree work, and we want to add some new trees and build some fairway bunkers."

Hiring Rollins was a very positive step, according to Hart: "Phil has the place looking great. We have a history of great greenskeepers, and Phil may be the best ever. That comes with working 14-hour days."

The club is currently negotiating with the Brattleboro Retreat to purchase the land that the club occupies. If that move is successful, then plans to construct another nine holes will be discussed. The time is certainly right for both changes. The club has a loyal and active membership and could use the extra nine holes. "The course is really full until noon every day," said Sargeant. The fact that four-somes who are starting the back nine

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are mixed in with front-nine golfers creates the sometimes congested course conditions.

If the club is successful in its attempt to purchase the land, then the expansion to 18 holes will fall into the capable hands of Rollins. When the topic of the new nine holes was raised, the former Sudbury, Massachusetts, country club assistant superintendent was quick with a smile and an answer. "I really hope that they build it," he said.

The existing course, with hills, blind shots and sloping greens, is challenging to players. A 205-yard, slightly downhill par-3 begins the round. If the long-iron shot off the tee is straight, then the club's entrance road that runs along the entire right side of the hole and the two sets of fairway sand traps will not come into play. A short but

straight tee shot can run onto the green and afford a good birdie opportunity.

A well-placed drive out of a chute will give a golfer an excellent birdie opportunity at the par-5 third hole. The 505 yards to the green are tight and hilly, but the downslope at the approach to the green makes it reachable in two shots. The long and narrow green will yield some makeable putts.

The first major test of a golfer's ability comes at the uphill, 380-yard, par-4 fourth hole. The fairway is wide, but it will take two full shots to reach the green in regulation. To make matters worse, the pear-shaped green, which sits atop a steep hill, has a severe downhill slope.

An iron off the tee is the smart choice at the downhill, par-4 eighth hole. A tight fairway with a dogleg to the right around a hill makes it unwise

for anyone to try to drive this 345-yard hole. The green sits on top of a mound and will send anything but a soft approach shot down the slopes into certain bogey territory. The second trip around is played from different tees, making the final round a challenge of a different nature.

Hart has been at Brattleboro for seven years. He gives lessons, conducts clinics, runs the tournaments, sets up the many different leagues people can play in, maintains the eighteen rental golf carts on hand, coaches the Brattleboro Union High School golf team and operates a well-stocked and attractive pro shop.

It's easy to tell Hart really enjoys his work. "This isn't just a golf course," he said. "There are wonderful people here." ♦♦♦



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