



THE GEORGIA TECH CLUB NO. 13

SCHOOL SPIRIT

FEW UNIVERSITIES HAVE A TOP-LEVEL PRIVATE CLUB TO CALL HOME, ALTHOUGH ONE WOULD THINK A GREAT COLLEGE GOLF PROGRAM LIKE GEORGIA TECH WOULD BE ONE OF THEM. IT IS NOW. **BY PATRICK JONES**

The Georgia Institute of Technology has consistently engineered some of the best collegiate golf teams and individual players in the nation. Amateur legend Bobby Jones was a Georgia Tech graduate. Other famous golfers to come out of the Ramblin' Wreck golf program include British Open champion David Duval, Ryder Cup regular Stewart Cink and 2002 Honda Classic champion Matt Kuchar.

The irony is that Georgia Tech is situated in the midst of the concrete confines of downtown Atlanta. The city's downtown connector, one of the most congested interstates in the country, rolls past the east side of the campus. High-rise buildings dominate the skyline. These urban restrictions dictate that there is no conveniently

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accessible golf course meandering through the heart of the institution's grounds. Instead, the Yellow Jackets have relied on access – and commutes – to some of the city's premier golf facilities to produce one of the nation's most respected programs.

The Tech golf team now has a new addition to its portfolio of available practice and playing resources: The Georgia Tech Club, located in Alpharetta. It is deemed as the official home course of the Georgia Tech golf team. The developer, University Clubs by Melrose, forged a licensing agreement with Georgia Tech's athletic and alumni associations. The school receives royalties from the sale of memberships and operating income from the Georgia Tech Club. The course, designed by architect Rees Jones, opened all 18 holes for play in October 2006.

"I really like everything that (Rees Jones) did out there," says Georgia Tech golf coach Bruce Heppler. "The fact that it can play back so far

(7,558 yards) for a real competitive player, now you have to actually hit some long irons into the par 4s, and play par 5s that are true par 5s. And there are some great par 3s."

The course was rated at 77.8 with a slope of 154 from the championship tees. Only a handful of courses in the country, including Pine Valley in New Jersey and the Ocean Course at Kiawah Island, numerically offer a higher degree of challenge.

"We use (the Georgia Tech Club) because it is very demanding and very challenging to go along with the other facilities we have access to for the team," says Heppler. "I think it is a great test. It really challenges our guys from a yardage standpoint and with the shot values. The conditions of the course are very good and they have been great to us out there. The practice facilities are some of the best in the Atlanta area. The short game area and the wedge area are exactly what we asked for."

Craig Hartle, the director of golf at the Georgia Tech Club, calls the practice facilities "expansive." The driving range can handle up to 100 players at a time if needed. There are three practice putting and chipping greens (one Bermuda, two bentgrass), and a separate putting-only green.

"You can hit anything from a pitch shot to a 320-yard driver. There are no limitations," says Hartle, who was recently named the Georgia PGA's Professional of the Year.

The golf course community features 230 homesites. Planned amenities include a 22,000-square-foot clubhouse and a swim and tennis center, the latter designed by former Wimbledon and U.S. Open champion Stan Smith.

Based on its name, the Georgia Tech Club obviously targets and caters to those with a fondness for everything that is Buzz. Not surprisingly, a former Yellow Jackets golfer was the first official resident of the surrounding Echelon community. But emboldened University of Georgia and Clemson fans, for instance, are also welcomed. A UGA alum, in fact, has already built a custom home off the No. 7 green and is a golf member.

"He just saw the value of the community," says Trip Shine, vice president of operations and general manager for the Georgia Tech Club, of the Bulldog resident. "Our affiliation with Georgia Tech is not so much based on the rah-rah that goes with Saturday football games, though there is some of that. I elevate it up. We are privileged to have a strategic partnership with one of the finest academic institutions in the country. We are the only development that can use the GT logo and all the positives that come along with that."

Any dedicated golfer without Georgia Tech leanings would be wise to jettison strong-held collegiate affiliations long enough to explore a round on this diverse and scenic private layout.

The course meanders through forested lowlands before dramatically rising and falling on the back nine. Golfers need to rev up their golf game on the front side and not get lulled into thinking the course is a pushover. "The front nine is easier – it's not easy – but it is easier than the back nine," says Hartle. "There are some holes back there that will drive you nuts."

No. 11 is a 618-yard par 5 that ranks as perhaps the toughest on the course. There is a hazard that must be carried off the tee, then another hazard that most golfers must lay up to on their second shot. There is an additional hazard to the left of the green. It's a hole that, for the average golfer, requires three solid shots in a row.

Jones made the most of almost mountainous terrain on the back side that provides great views, and forces precise club selections on par 3s and approach shots.

"What impressed me most from the start was the dramatic nature of the natural features of the property," says Jones. "We were able to weave the golf course around the existing streams and lakes in the valleys as well as up to the ridges that provide great vistas of the distant hills. I made numerous visits to the

property to refine the design and incorporate the details and nuances that make each round of golf unique. I am most pleased with the fact that we were able to incorporate a wide variety of holes into a beautifully cohesive golf course that flows and unfolds as you play it."

Hartle said the greens, in particular, are one of the most notable features of the Jones' design.

"The conditions of the entire course are phenomenal, but the greens are excellent – firm and fast...but fair," says Hartle. "Most of our greens are subtle slopes and not real undulating. We can get them fast and very fair to the best players in the country and to the 25-handicapper." ■

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The course designed by Rees Jones is massive enough not only to test the best college players but the best professional players. Move up a tee box or two and it becomes a great members' course.

The community around the course is Echelon, which is in the first phase of its development with 85 one-acre lots.

The developer has quite a history with golf. The Melrose Company developed the Melrose Club on Hilton Head Island as well as Hilton Head Plantation. Among its other projects are Lake Nona in Orlando and Pinewild in Pinehurst.