

COURSE REVIEW

# SANDHURST CLUB

SANDHURST • VICTORIA

*What began as an ambitious idea in the early 1990s is today a thriving residential community with two nationally-ranked golf courses lying at its heart.*

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY **BRENDAN JAMES**

**F**or the avid golfer, Melbourne's south-east might best be described as paradise.

From the world-famous Sandbelt layouts to the spectacular fairways of the Mornington Peninsula further to the south, the region has a plethora of incredible courses seemingly at every turn.

One of the most recent additions to the eastern edge of the Sandbelt is the Sandhurst Club – a 36-hole golf complex just 40 minutes' drive from the CBD.

The idea for Sandhurst was conceived nearly three decades ago and over the few years that followed, the plan morphed into a project that ultimately saw the creation of a master-planned community – now home to more than 5,200 residents – with two championship standard golf courses, modern clubhouse, a training facility and a PGA of Australia Centre for Learning and Performance at its hub. Ambitious ... yes. Impossible ... no.

Today, much of the real estate is occupied

and both Peter Thomson and Ross Perrett-designed layouts – known as the North and Champions Courses – are continuing to evolve as fine challenges for players of all abilities. A mark of the quality of golf to be found at Sandhurst is both courses are ranked in *Golf Australia magazine's* Top-100 Public Access Courses for 2023.

With five-time Open champion Thomson having such strong ties and a love of golf in Scotland it should not come as any surprise that a course bearing his name might, in some ►



THE BEST LINE INTO THE NORTH COURSE'S 18TH GREEN IS FROM NEAR THE LAKE AND BUNKERS LEFT.





A HUGE DOUBLE GREEN LIES AT THE END OF THE 11TH (LEFT) AND 17TH HOLES ON THE NORTH COURSE.



THE NORTH COURSE BOASTS A FINE COLLECTION OF PAR-3 HOLES, WITH THE 8TH BEING ARGUABLY THE BEST.



A 1.6-METRE-HIGH WALL IS A QUIRKY ADDITION TO THE NORTH COURSE'S PAR-3 3RD HOLE.

part, pay homage to the great links of the Home of Golf. The North Course does just that.

It is a layout that closely follows Thomson's philosophy of design, which comes from the traditional links-style courses of Scotland where the belief is that golf is a game played predominantly along the ground, not in the air.

There was high expectation attached to the project, given the new layout's proximity to the Melbourne Sandbelt and the finest courses in the land. With the aid of modern construction equipment, computer-aided design and a lot of imagination, Thomson and Perrett were successfully able to turn relatively flat and degraded cow pastures into rolling links land.

They delivered a fine course, which opened for play in 2004, that has grown in stature as its playing surfaces and the wild grasses

**“**  
*THE NORTH COURSE IS RELATIVELY FLAT, MAKING FOR AN EASY WALK, BUT THE SUBTLE RIPPLES IN THE FAIRWAYS HAVE SOME INFLUENCE ON THE SHAPE OF SHOTS YOU WILL HIT.*  
**”**  
**– TOP-100 RANKING JUDGE, EDWARD LEE**

surrounding most fairways have matured, giving the layout even greater definition.

The aim was to build upon the indelible characteristics of the old Scottish links. If you're not hearing the bagpipes as you wander down the 1st fairway, you will undoubtedly be consumed by their eerie presence as you stand on the 3rd tee.

This 181-metre (from the black championship markers) par-3 is the signature hole of the North Course and transports you to the 1st hole at Prestwick, the 11th at Royal Troon or the 13th at North Berwick – holes that have been made famous because a stone wall borders an edge of the putting surface.

Thomson pays homage to this design quirk

at the 3rd, known as 'Wall', with a 1.6-metre-high stone wall flanking the entire left side and rear of the green. There are no bunkers on this gem of a hole, just a slightly crumpled landscape that flattens out to accommodate the putting surface next to the L-shaped wall. In the early stages of COVID lockdowns, Course Superintendent Cory Budden and his staff reshaped the 3rd green to add some contouring to the vast bentgrass putting surface.

It wasn't the only project undertaken on the North Course during the pandemic as bentgrass collars and green surrounds were converted to couch, while many bunkers throughout the front nine were also remodelled.

Wind plays a major factor at Sandhurst and Thomson – drawing on more than 60 years of playing the Sandbelt – routed the North Course to take advantage of prevailing breezes

as well as unusual winds.

The back nine also has some wonderful highlights including the 497-metre par-5 11th – known as 'Purgatory', which rewards the player for risking everything from the tee in trying to clear two fairway traps to get a generous kick forward to put the green in range for two shots.

The 321-metre par-4 14th is a delightful short dogleg right while the 392-metre par-4 18th, known as Woe Betide, is a solid closing hole with water left, seven bunkers bordering the fairway left and right, and another three large sand traps as well as humps and swales guarding the equally grand putting surface. The brave player skirting the edge of the lake and left side bunkers from the tee will be left with a much easier second shot approach.

"The North Course is relatively flat, making

for an easy walk, but the subtle ripples in the fairways have some influence on the shape of shots you will hit. I quite enjoyed my last round here as its width from the tee keeps you in play but finding the right spot to have an easier follow-up shot takes a lot more skill," Top-100 ranking judge, Edward Lee, said of the North Course.

The adjoining Champions Course, which opened for play in 2008, covers more undulating terrain than its neighbour and, therefore, offers a greater variety of holes and shots. The course, from the tips, is also a clear 200 metres shorter than the North Course but the challenge is no less.

While the surrounding residential development is more intrusive on the Champions Course than the North layout, the quality of the holes and the playing surfaces ►



“  
THIS IS A BIG GOLF COURSE WITH SOME BIG MOMENTS  
THROUGHOUT. THERE'S PROBABLY NONE BIGGER THAN THE TEE  
SHOT ON THE SHORTEST HOLE ON THE COURSE, THE PAR-3 11TH.

”  
– TOP-100 RANKING JUDGE, JACK DONALDSON.



THE SHORT PAR-3 11TH (LEFT) AND  
THE TIGHT DRIVING 17TH HOLE ON  
THE CHAMPIONS LAYOUT

guarantee a satisfying round.

The wide-sprawl bunkering of the Champions is more the influence of Perrett than Thomson, who always favoured smaller bunkers in greater numbers. Beyond the bunkering, it is hard not to be impressed by the size and shaping of the greens on each hole, which have each been dedicated to a past winner of the Australian PGA Championship. This makes for an enjoyable added feature of a round as every tee has a plaque commemorating a player with a brief story of their career. For example, the 7th hole is dedicated to Kel Nagle, the winner of a record six PGA championships, while other players immortalised include Craig Parry, Greg Norman, Ossie Pickworth, David Graham and Wayne Grady.

This layout is more of the traditional Sandbelt-style with gentle fairway contours,

open-fronted large greens and some fairways lined by ancient Red River gums.

“From a design point of view, the holes offer plenty of variety,” Perrett said. “No two are the same. It will eventually be seen as a course of endless fascination with primary hazards dictating play.”

Ever the strategist, Thomson brought the same emphasis on thinking golf to his course designs and this can be seen from the opening shot of the round.

The 376-metre par-4 1st, named after the three-time PGA winner Carnegie Clark, offers a generously wide fairway for players, who resist using the driver, in preference for a fairway metal to leave a longer second shot into the green. The further you drive the ball from the 1st tee the narrower the cut portion becomes and the more likely a bogey will be

scored after hitting from the rough.

Smart play is also needed at the short par-4 4th hole, which appears seemingly easy when standing on the tee but the full extent of the test becomes apparent as you wander down the fairway. This classic two-shotter is just 337 metres from back markers and the two bunkers seen to the right of the fairway provide the best line for the drive. Hitting as close as possible to these two hazards – without dribbling into the sand – leaves you in the best spot to hit a short iron at any pin position on a green that is angled diagonally away from right-to-left. A drive down the middle of the fairway leaves a tough and obscured shot over a large bunkered ridge. Eric Cremin, who won two PGA titles in the 1930s and was runner-up in the championship a record seven times, would be proud to have

his name on this gem.

One of best holes on the Champions layout is the shortest hole, named after the shortest of the PGA winners celebrated here – Norman Von Nida. The 138-metre uphill par-3 11th hole is affected by wind so your club selection here is vital to avoid the waste bunker stretching across the front of the green and the three deep bunkers flanking the long and narrow putting surface.

“This is a big golf course with some big moments throughout. There’s probably none bigger than the tee shot on the shortest hole on the course, the par-3 11th ... It’s only a short iron but the prospect of dropping short in the wasteland bunker, or finding a deeper sandy hazard left or right, can rattle your nerves on the tee,” Top-100 judge Jack Donaldson said. 🌟

ONE OF THE BEST SHORT PAR-4  
HOLES AT SANDHURST, CHAMPIONS’  
4TH, KNOWN AS ERIC CREMIN.



THE FINAL APPROACH TO THE PAR-5  
10TH ON THE CHAMPIONS LAYOUT,  
NAMED AFTER GREG NORMAN.



## FACT FILE

**LOCATION:** Sandhurst Boulevard, Sandhurst, Victoria

**CONTACT:** (03) 8787 7011

**WEBSITE:** www.sandhurst.com

**DESIGNERS:** Peter Thomson and Ross Perrett – North (2004), Champions (2008).

**PLAYING SURFACES:** North Course: Bentgrass (greens), Santa Ana couch (fairways). Champions Course: Bentgrass (greens), Legends couch (fairways).

**COURSE SUPERINTENDENT:** Cory Budden.

**PGA PROFESSIONALS:** Jon Abbott (Golf & Sports Manager), Cameron Davies and Jaydon Vaenuku.

**GREEN FEES:** Sandhurst welcomes visitors Sunday through Friday. From \$69 (18 holes, weekday); \$109 (Sunday).

**MEMBERSHIP:** Sandhurst offers five-, six- and full seven-day memberships. There is a membership best suited to your playing needs. Membership at Sandhurst brings with it a wide range of benefits including unparalleled access to 36 holes as well as premium modern facilities.

**ACCOLADES:** North Course ranked No.82 and Champions Course No.72 in *Golf Australia* magazine’s Top-100 Public Access Courses for 2023.





## “WHO ARE THE PLAYERS EUROPE WILL BE LOOKING AT IN HOPEFUL RYDER CUP EXPECTATION?”

**Rory McIlroy calls them “the core” of the next European Ryder Cup team, which makes sense.**

It is hard to imagine the Old World lining up at the Marco Simone Country Club outside Rome in September without Rory, Jon Rahm, Viktor Hovland, Tyrrell Hatton, Tommy Fleetwood, Shane Lowry and Matt Fitzpatrick. They are – for the moment – the seven stand-outs within the squad of 12 that will attempt to wrest the trophy back from American hands and maintain a long unbeaten run for Europe in home games. Three decades have passed since Uncle Sam’s nephews finished first in the biennial contest on foreign soil.

Hang on though. Assuming Rory’s assessment of the situation is correct, at least one of his six buddies (he is a racing certainty to be there) will require one of captain Luke Donald’s half-a-dozen wildcard picks. So, it follows that, if more than one needs a friendly nod from the non-playing skipper, the team is – theoretically at least – weakened.

That’s important because it says here that Europe will need its very best side if it is to prevail over the big, bad Americans. In contrast to his non-playing counterpart, U.S. Captain Zach Johnson could head into battle armed with numbers 13-24 on his preferred list and still be competitive. 25-36 would

have more than a wee chance of winning too. Donald has no such luxury.

So, who are the players Europe will be looking at in hopeful Ryder Cup expectation? Happily, there are more than five likely lads in contention. Those in receipt of Donald’s largesse will therefore have golfed their balls with no little distinction prior to lining-up alongside the magnificent seven.

Again, that matters.

The last thing Donald needs is someone not approaching top-form in the bottom half of his side, especially if, as nearly always happens in these team things, someone in the top-half arrives firing on something less than all cylinders. See Rory during Europe’s 19-9 ass-whipping at Whistling Straits two years ago. By the way, that can’t happen again. If Europe is to win, their best players have to win most of their games. Amidst all the statistical nonsense that has become part of 21st century Ryder Cups, that immutable law remains intact.

Okay, it’s time for your fearless columnist to make some predictions. Here, in no particular order, are the five men who will best compliment Rory’s gang of seven, given that it is impossible to argue with his logic in that department. They are, eight months out from the matches, indisputably Europe’s best players.

Rumours of what would be an unfortunate dalliance with LIV Golf have long surrounded Thomas Pieters, but it is to be hoped that the prospect of a second Ryder Cup appearance is enough to keep the gifted Belgian on-side and in the side. He was a sensation back in 2016, totting-up four points from his five games amidst a comfortable American victory at Hazeltine. Along the way, Pieters formed a potent partnership with Rory, one that could well be resurrected seven years on.

It is hard also, to dispute the claims of Seamus Power and Sepp Straka. The Irishman and the Austrian both laboured long and hard in the professional ranks before making it as tournament winners. Apart from anything else they bring to the team table; you have to like that fact. Alongside its stars, every side needs workhorses, guys that can be relied upon to perform at or above their level. That is, guys who will always beat off-form opponents and who will ask that the opponent plays really well if he is to prevail.

In that regard, I want Alex Noren and Adrian Meronk in Donald’s team. The Swede, who performed well in Europe’s 2018 victory in France, is the “play with anyone, anytime” guy every team needs. See Bernhard Langer in days gone by. And Meronk? The man makes many birdies and he’s the current Irish Open and Australian Open champion. Need I say more?

At this point there is a temptation to veer off-piste and select one or both of the identical Hojgaard twins, Rasmus and Nicolai. There is obvious fun to be had in the confusion they could create wearing team clothing. And both, it must be said, offer more than physical resemblance. But both fall into our “possibles” category rather than “probables.” Both are perfectly capable of playing well in a Ryder Cup environment – Nicolai won the 2021 Italian Open at Marco Simone – but both would represent something of a risk. That’s a lot of boths.

The same can be argued of others. I’m thinking of Thomas Detry of Belgium. And, in a way I can’t see happening, Spaniard Adrian Otaegui. Maybe that is the only certainty amidst all of this conjecture. No one from LIV Golf is going to get picked.



JON RAHM & RORY MCILROY WILL BE FRONTRUNNERS OF EUROPE’S RYDER CUP CAMPAIGN



North Course



Champions Course

## SANDHURST CLUB

36 championship holes | Premium course condition year round | Modern Clubhouse & facilities

Located just 5 minutes from EastLink and Peninsula Link in Melbourne’s south-east.

A range of memberships available.

Visitors and social groups welcome Sunday to Friday.

Corporate golf specialists.

UNBEATABLE *Value*  
UNPARALLELED *Access*

SANDHURST.COM | (03) 8787 7011



LEARN MORE