



Press release
19 May 2010

BMW PGA Championship 2010: “We’ve made a great course even better.”

An interview with world-class golfer and course designer Ernie Els.

Question: Mr Els, how are you feeling going into the BMW PGA Championship?

Ernie Els: I’m very excited. I’m really looking forward to the first professional tournament on the new West Course.

Question: It’s a course that has undergone several phases of renovation work over recent years – for which you have been responsible.

Els: It’s no secret how special this place is for me. I’ve got a house here and won the World Matchplay tournament at Wentworth seven times. So it was clearly an honour to be given the responsibility of bringing this classic course into the 21st century.

Question: The course was set up by Harry Colt in 1926 and has hosted a wealth of major tournaments, including the Ryder Cup in 1953, the World Matchplay from 1964 to 2007, and the BMW PGA Championship since 1984.

Els: The West Course is a wonderful venue, but I think we’ve succeeded in making it even better. Hopefully, Harry Colt is up there somewhere looking down on us with a nod of approval.

Question: What exactly have you changed?

Els: The modernisation project spanned three phases. In the first stage between October 2005 and May 2006, Wentworth Club and my team set about lengthening a number of holes and remodelling a lot of the bunkers. The aim was to bring them back into play; with the pros nowadays hitting the ball so much further, not all areas of the course were playing as Colt intended. Some of the more minor changes were completed in 2007 as part of the second phase of development. Then, in stage three over the last few months we’ve focused again on some of the bunkers, but above all on the greens.

Question: What modifications have you made?

Els: All 18 greens have been upgraded to USGA (US Golf Association) specification in order to bring them up to the very highest standards, and drainage has been improved as well. At the same time the poa annua grass was replaced with colonial bent.

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Question: Are you happy with the results?

Els: The whole process was taken very seriously and professionally. All our design plans were shown to Mr. Richard Caring and the entire Wentworth team and after we received their approval, we turned our proposals into the design which now exists as the new-look West Course. We had a very close working and rewarding relationship with MJAbbot, the Salisbury-based construction and renovation specialists, throughout all aspects of the changes. I also cast a critical eye over everything whenever I was at home in London and if I wasn't there then Greg Letsche, my head designer, and Gordon Johnstone, our shaper/design co-ordinator, were overseeing the development. Mr Caring also showed a very keen interest in the changes and there was a big collective effort to ensure we produced something very special. We at Ernie Els Design are very proud with what we achieved.

Question: What sort of feedback are you expecting?

Els: I honestly think they'll love the course.

Question: Could the changes to the course help you win your first BMW PGA Championship at the 15th attempt?

Els: That would be nice! Seriously, though, things couldn't have gone much better for me here. Although I never won the BMW PGA Championship on the old course, I did win the World Matchplay seven times. So you could say the course has suited me pretty well.

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