



BY
TAN JU KUANG



2015 SINGAPORE GOLF COURSE RANKINGS

SERAPONG SWEEP

SENTOSA GOLF CLUB'S CHAMPIONSHIP LAYOUT COMES OUT TOPS IN ALL THE CATEGORIES IN THE BIENNIAL GOLF DIGEST COURSE RANKINGS FOR SINGAPORE

It may come as little surprise that Sentosa Golf Club's Serapong Course is the best course in the country,

but the championship layout's domination in this year's ratings proves that the premier club continues to maintain its edge over all comers in every aspect.

The Golf Digest ranking of golf courses in Singapore is conducted once every two years, and this year is unusual in that several of the golf clubs here were not rated because of redevelopment. The clubs that were excluded in this year's rating process included Orchid Country Club (OCC), National Service Resort and Country Club (NSRCC), Marina Bay, Sentosa Golf Club's Tanjong Course, and Laguna National Golf & Country Club's Masters Course.

Renovations – undergoing or planned – are on the way at OCC, NSRCC, Marina Bay and Laguna National's Masters course, while Sentosa's Tanjong will close on Nov 1 for a total makeover.

With the above list out of the rankings, only 16 courses (only 18-hole layouts are considered) were eligible for ratings this year.

Regardless of which courses were omitted, there is little doubt that Serapong remains the top course in the country, and is also arguably one of the best in Asia. Much can be said about a course where the

designer moved on to be the Director of Agronomy, then proceeded to take over the helm as General Manager.

"We are blessed to be surrounded by a team of world class, dedicated and long service staff," says Andrew Johnston, Sentosa Golf Club General Manager, who was integral in the Serapong's design, and who has continually been upgrading the course over the years.

"This in turn allows us to look after our world-class members. We are committed to delivering a quality memorable experience."

While keeping a constant eye on the quality of Serapong, Johnston's attentions have veered towards the redevelopment of the Tanjong Course, which will begin construction in November.

"Tanjong will embrace a look, feel, style and playing strategy resembling its own character," reveals Johnston.

"The style will resemble a classic course design

look, with smaller green surfaces, and fewer bunkering than Serapong."

With the exception of Serapong's continued perch at the top of the rankings, this year's list threw up several interesting results.

Tanah Merah Country Club's Garden Course, a former Golf Digest No. 1 Course in Singapore, proved that its redesign didn't ruffle too many feathers, and remains second best in the country.

Towards the end of 2014, 10 hectares of land on which the old Garden layout sat on had to be given up for expansion works at the Changi International Airport. Tanah Merah took only three months to redesign the course, resulting in a new par-70 layout that features several new holes and water features.

But perhaps the most attention-grabbing revelation of all is Jurong Country Club's surge into the top-three.

Since the club redeveloped its course to great aplomb more than three years ago, the Ted Parslow design has gotten rave reviews. The course has since matured, and with continual attention to conditioning (it ranks second in this category, after Serapong), has secured its lofty position this year. It is a great pity that all this will disappear in a year's time.

Earlier this year, the land authorities announced that it would take back the land from Jurong Country Club, several years before its lease expires, for development of the rail corridor to Malaysia.

"The club has been told categorically that it will not be offered any alternative venue," said a spokesman for the club.

"Therefore Jurong Country Club cannot continue. We accept the need for national progress but feel heart-broken that it comes, in this case, at the expense of a flourishing, successful club that provides healthy sporting activity and a warm, friendly social environment to almost 3,000 members plus their families, as well as to members of the public who have always been welcome at JCC."

While clubs such as Sentosa, Tanah Merah and Jurong have managed to maintain – or in the case of Jurong, improve on – their reputations of quality conditioning, others have had their share of problems on the greens.

Putting surfaces at Singapore Island Country Club's New Course, and Raffles Country Club were hit by fungal disease that proved more difficult to remedy than expected.

"Our courses were unfortunate to be attacked by Pythium Blight – a fungal disease that affects Bermuda grass due to heavy rain and high temperatures over several days," provided Dennis Ee, Golf Manager at Raffles, in explanation.

The added fact that these two clubs have courses situated next to our reservoirs may have also compromised the use of chemicals to fix the problem.

Meanwhile, several of the other smaller clubs have shone in their efforts to put forth viable courses that are consistent when it comes to maintenance.

In addition to Jurong's stellar performance in this year's ratings, Sembawang Country Club continues to punch way above its weight, coming in second in terms of Design Variety and Memorability (see sidebar on categories rated).

Sembawang's maintenance is outsourced, but that doesn't mean the club sits on its laurels on a day-to-day basis.

"We constantly monitor what our contractor is doing in terms of cultural practices and work schedule. It is very important that this is closely supervised and monitored," provides Paul Decipeda, Sembawang's Golf Manager.

"The marshals are also on the lookout for any anomalies on the course and report to us as soon as they are discovered."

Even in golf, timeliness is next to godliness.

While Sentosa Golf Club's strong backing by the Sentosa Development Corporation might put it on the front foot when it comes to shoring up its sta-



Sentosa Golf Club's Serapong Course (facing page, far left) is ranked No. 1 in Singapore, followed by TMCC's Garden Course (above) in second place, Jurong Country Club's redone golf course (near left) in third, and Sembawang Country Club (below) in a surprise sixth.



2015 GOLF DIGEST SINGAPORE COURSE RANKINGS

Rank	Clubs	SV	RS	DV	M	A	C	CA	Adj Ttl
1	Sentosa Serapong	8.61	8.47	8.29	8.49	8.67	9.17	8.70	69.00
2	TMCC Garden	7.62	7.66	7.33	7.62	7.98	8.34	8.00	62.17
3	Jurong C C	7.60	7.70	7.62	7.62	7.60	8.46	7.82	62.02
4	SICC Bukit	7.76	7.61	7.54	7.48	7.52	7.73	8.00	61.39
5	Laguna W Classic	7.55	8.01	7.52	7.28	7.16	8.18	7.53	60.76
6	Sembawang C C	7.42	7.50	7.71	7.66	7.20	7.62	7.31	59.84
7	Seletar C C	7.58	7.69	7.38	7.34	7.46	7.20	7.46	59.68
8	TMCC Tampines	7.40	7.14	7.47	7.16	7.30	7.10	7.80	58.77
9	SICC Island	7.35	7.36	6.44	6.82	6.95	6.61	7.39	56.27
10	Keppel Club	7.32	7.17	6.92	7.08	6.82	6.73	6.77	56.12
11	SICC New	7.07	7.21	7.14	7.22	7.10	5.86	7.15	55.82
12	SICC Sime	7.00	6.81	6.71	6.63	6.87	7.13	7.49	55.63
13	Raffles Lake	6.63	6.91	6.70	6.63	6.67	6.49	6.76	53.44
14	NSRCC Kranji S.	6.83	6.76	6.68	6.19	6.47	6.80	6.68	53.22
15	Raffles Palm	6.80	6.95	6.73	6.63	6.16	5.47	6.26	51.79
16	Warren G C	6.72	6.81	6.66	6.58	6.05	5.31	6.13	50.97

LEGENDS:
SV – Shot Value
RS – Resistance to Scoring
DV – Design Variety
M – Memorability
A – Aesthetics
C – Conditioning
CA – Course Ambience

SCALE RANGE:
10 – Absolutely perfect
8.0 to 9.9 – Outstanding
6.0 to 7.9 – Very good to excellent
4.0 to 5.9 – Acceptable to good
2.0 to 3.9 – Poor to tolerable
1.0 to 1.9 – Unacceptable

THE METHOD

The Golf Digest Singapore Golf Course Rankings is conducted once in every two years. Our panel of independent and experienced golfers submits ratings for each golf course they've played on within a six-month period prior to the publishing of the rankings.

The courses are ranked on seven different categories – Shot Value, Resistance To Scoring, Design Variety, Memorability, Aesthetics, Conditioning and Course Ambience.

Each category is ranked on a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being the best (or the most difficult where Resistance To Scoring is concerned). The score for Shot Value is counted double when totaling the aggregate score for each golf course.

clubs like Sembawang and Jurong have shown that you can still keep golfers happy on a more modest budget.

Consistent monitoring, identifying problems early, and understanding the challenging nature of our weather, all play an integral role in keeping courses in tip-top shape. There is much to be said about greenkeeping being more art than science.

Taken into perspective, the landscape will likely change the next time our Singapore golf course rankings come out in 2017.

By then, the new Tanjong Course would have opened, and Laguna National's much-respected Masters Course would have completed its considerable makeover. The usually well-regarded courses at NSRCC would also have been fully renovated, expectedly to militarily precise specifications and standards.

But for now, Serapong stands head and shoulders above all.