

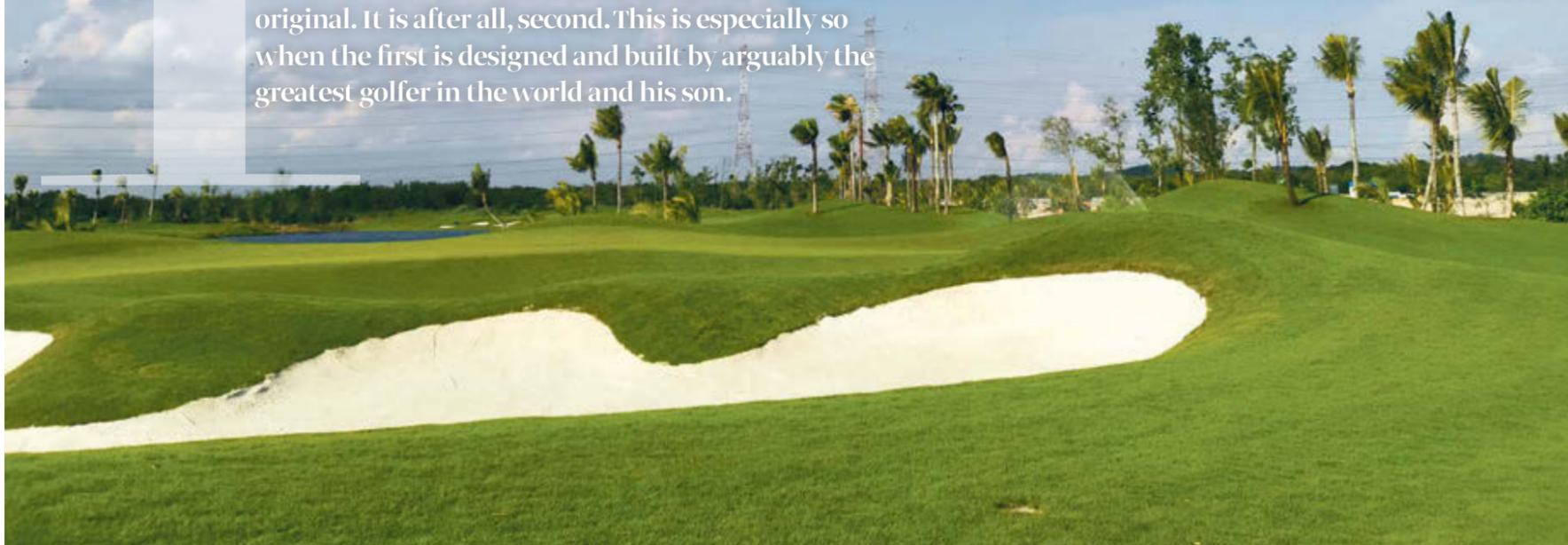
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BY
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FOREST CITY LGK CLASSIC COURSE

THE SEQUEL OUTSTRIPS THE FIRST

It is hard to imagine any sequel being better than the original. It is after all, second. This is especially so when the first is designed and built by arguably the greatest golfer in the world and his son.



However, it is without any doubt that the newly opened Liang Guo-kun designed Classic Course at Forest City Golf Club is indeed a more interesting proposition than Nicklaus's Legacy course.

"Liang-dong", as he is respectfully addressed to mean 'Director Liang', is a gentle man in his 60s who has been instrumental in Chinese developer Country Garden's golf properties in Shunde and Holiday Islands, both in Guangdong.

The Classic Course at Forest City is not only his first in Johor, Malaysia, it is also his first outside of China.

To be fair, the Legacy course was always meant to be a neutral course that caters to all levels of play, and thus the wide fairways, few out-of-bound areas and water hazards make this approachable even for a relative beginner.

The LGK Classic course takes advantage of the same marshland landscape to sculpt its holes, and apart from being exposed to strong winds, the similarities end there.

From the start, out-of-bounds is already in play. The par-five second hole may have two large landing zones and as long as the ball remains left, it is fine. However, on the approach, a pulled shot to a smallish green will meet a watery grave that is hidden from view from the fairway.

The number and size of lakes and water bodies here ensure that there are no free lunches. Every hole faces the prospect of having been met with water.

Waste bunkers along the fringes of the lake edges make for an aesthetically pleasing, yet daunting presence when faced with making good shots to clear them. The third hole is one such example.

For a par-three at 176 yards off the blue tees, it is headwind all the way to the green protected front and left by water. A long waste bunker starts up from the teebox all the way to the green. Only a brave, well struck shot is good enough for par here.

Another good par-three (as all of them are)

is the next one on Hole 6. A true island green reminiscent of TPC Sawgrass, it would elicit the same drama with the inevitable winds sweeping in.

On the eighth hole, named "Achilles", is a 512-yard par-five that has three clusters of bunkers protecting the teeshot, the approach and the green. A long drive can set up for a chance at making this in two and with drop-offs that separate the green from the bunkers, it is a conceivable opportunity for to make birdie or even an eagle.

The back nine of the Classic is in most cases, more interesting.

The par-three 11th hole hits you with an almost 200-yard drive (most amateurs would use a driver here) that has a large cluster of bunkers covering the entirety of the distance to the green.

Number 13, called "Heracles" will certainly catch the eye as a par-five with two fairways. Confidence will take the teeshot to the right while a safer journey veers towards the left. A large lake punishes all along the right so any long approach that is even slightly pushed (a common occurrence with amateur golfers) tends to find watery grave.

From there, the finishing holes are among the best in Johor. The 16th is a tight dogleg left par-four that lulls long drivers into thinking that they can reach the green with their drives. It takes a 280-yard bomb from the blue tees to do so.

The par-three 17th, is a short hole with what may be the smallest green on the course. While seemingly easy at 149 yards, any ball that gets into either of three small and deep bunkers will mean more than a stroke lost.

The 18th hole is probably the toughest and best finishing hole of the lot. This 539-yard par-five hole has three land masses separated by a large, singular water body. The teeshot is already exposed to a long waste bunker on the left and out of bounds all along the right.

It is too risky trying to make this green in two, even for long-hitters. The green is an island that is surrounded by bunkers and water and any long



Strategic use of bunkering and waterways make the Classic course a challenging layout to play at.

approach flying in would most certainly bounce hard and off its paspalum grass.

There are many things that surprise visitors to Classic course. The routing, the aesthetically pleasing yet tough bunkering, the use of waterways, the hard and fast inverted greens and the fact that every tee shot offers a variety of ways to get to the final destination.

This is a thinker's course, which means it will be fun to play over and over again. If Forest City did this well on their second course, one wonders what the third, which has already begun construction, is going to be like.