

For once, submerge all nagging concerns about the greens and fairways of the Singapore Island Country Club's New Course into the flowing pools of the spectacular waterfalls adorning the impressive clubhouse.

I came away with this deep impression after playing a round at the redeveloped New Course's Composite Nine, which also left me in awe and wonder as to how a mediocre layout is being transformed into a fabulous course.

No doubt, it is early days yet, with redevelopment of the New and Millennium courses into a championship 27-hole wonder still almost two years away from being the finished product.

But from indications of the playing experience on the Composite Nine are a gauge, SICC members and their guests are set for a grand opening of a great course.

The greens, once the club's bugbear, are in great shape, the fairways are pristine and the bunkers as best as they can be.

And the set-up has a fresh, clean look.

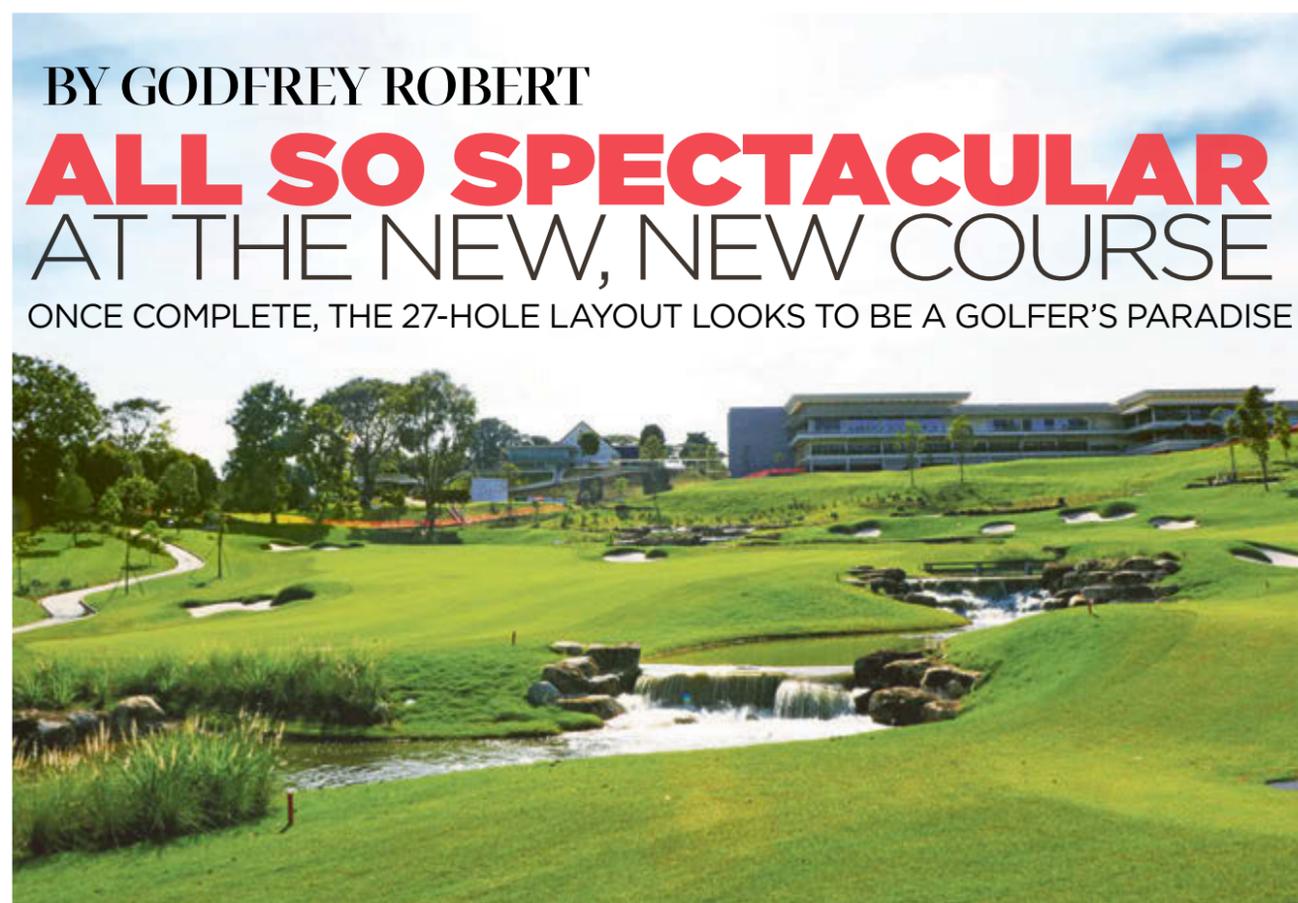
The New Course was last redeveloped in 2002, with only minor rectifications work undertaken since. The irrigation and drainage systems have been in need of major upgrading works. The greens profile and drainage system had deteriorated over the years, and the Tifdwarf Bermuda turfgrass had also mutated and become contaminated with a mixture of other undesirable grasses.

The fairways which were originally planted with local Zoysia grass had also become highly contaminated with undesirable grasses and weeds.

If those were not enough reasons for the club to embark on a project that is estimated to cost between \$40 million and \$50 million, the impending loss of the club's Sime and Bukit courses by 2030 makes it all the more important that the New Course needed a major upgrading.

In fact, many compelling reasons have been put forward by the club's general committee for the grand forward step.

One, SICC is set to lose the Sime course in 2021 to Keppel Club, and the Bukit course in 2030. This is part of the Government's review of golf courses in Singapore



BY GODFREY ROBERT
ALL SO SPECTACULAR
 AT THE NEW, NEW COURSE

ONCE COMPLETE, THE 27-HOLE LAYOUT LOOKS TO BE A GOLFER'S PARADISE



Hole 4 (left) and Hole 6 (above) are pretty and offer a treat in playability.

in which the number of 18-hole courses will be reduced from 20 in 2015 to 15 in 2021, and to 13 by 2030.

So if nothing was done at the Island location with the loss of the Bukit location, there would be a severe shortage of playing times, especially during weekends, for the club's 3,000-strong active golfers among the 18,000 members.

Therefore, it was imperative to explore options to increase the golfing capacity at Island location and the most viable option was to redevelop the New and

Millennium courses into a 27-hole course.

Then, with golf courses becoming more limited in Singapore in the future, high-quality golf courses are likely to command a premium. Investment in golf courses may be expected to provide the club with a return on investment in the form of future higher membership value.

Further costs are inevitable as for redevelopment plans the Government requirement is that a public park connector along the reservoir edge, starting from Hole 15 and 16 of the

New Course to the TreeTop Walk is to be constructed.

Also, the club is required to ensure that it is self-sufficient in water, which calls for the construction of an adequate and efficient water management and rainwater harvesting system.

The biggest positive is that within the limited land available at the Island location, the construction of a 27-hole course will add 46,720 golf rounds per year to the existing 159,744 rounds per year at the Island location.

It will help considerably to mitigate the loss of golf

rounds when the land leases of Sime (79,872 golf rounds per year) and Bukit courses (79,872 golf rounds per year) expire.

The club felt that it is important to time the redevelopment when members can continue to play at Bukit and Sime courses, before they are handed over. And it will ensure proper scheduling and planning to minimise downtime and disruption so that members can continue to enjoy playing.

Out of 12 recommendations, Graham Marsh Golf Design was selected as the golf course architect to reconfigure the 27-hole layout. Several revisions were made thereafter to enhance the design, namely the three nines play to par-36, par-36 and par-35.

The massive additions of rounds at the 27-hole course will help considerably to mitigate the loss of golf rounds when the land leases of Sime and Bukit courses expire.

The three nines are named Millennium, Peirce and Forest and the club is targeting to complete the redevelopment of 27 holes in 18 to 21 months.

photos: The Singapore Island Country Club