

Carolinas Golf



THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE CAROLINAS GOLF ASSOCIATION
VOL. 29, NO. 1

CAROLINASGOLF.ORG
SPRING 2022

U.S. Women's Open Returns

N.C. in the Spotlight, as **Pine Needles** hosts for a fourth time



Designed by a Dream Team

Forsyth Country Club bears the architectural DNA of both A.W. Tillinghast and Donald Ross in a layout that has delighted and challenged golfers for more than a century **BY MICHAEL J. SOLENDER**

While 1913 was the year Forsyth Country Club was formally established in Winston-Salem, N.C., golf historians argue early American golfers were striking balls across the site's open fields for years prior. It was 1918 when the original 9-hole course designed by A.W. Tillinghast opened for play. A rerouted 18-hole layout came in 1923, created by Donald Ross as requested by an enthusiastic membership.

A 2007 restoration project brought back the shot values A.W. Tillinghast and Donald Ross intended at Forsyth Country Club.

According to longtime FCC member Frank Morris, Ross returned to FCC in 1947, where he met with 9-time club champion Tully Blair – a legendary local golfer whose lengthy list of accomplishments on the links include the first amateur to win the Carolinas Open in 1929.

“Blair was the unofficial caretaker of the course,” said longtime FCC member Frank Morris. “Like many other Scottish-vintage courses, Forsyth’s layout went out and then back in, with hole 9 being the furthest away from the clubhouse. Blair wanted the nines to be able to come back to the clubhouse to accommodate the late-afternoon golfer who just wanted to play a quick nine. Ross, in what was seen as a stroke of his genius, added what is now our 7th hole and converted several holes in a rerouting, bringing the 9th back to the clubhouse.”

Morris discovered even more about the storied course changes in 1990, as part of the research he was doing for the club supporting a course enhancement by Dan Maples, he visited the Tufts Archives in Pinehurst, a repository of more than 200 Donald Ross field sketches.

“While I didn’t find the graph drawings for Forsyth’s greens,” Morris says, “I did discover drawings for another 18-hole layout at Forsyth that was never built. I found two routing drawings from J. B. McGovern, a colleague and collaborator of Ross. One routing was the one that was built, the other, ironically was the one Blair was given by Ross in 1947. Ross had that plan from the 1920s. His stroke of genius in the rerouting, it turns out, was incorporating McGovern’s existing routing from a quarter-century earlier.”

Rob Fowler, a longtime FCC member and club historian for the Donald Ross Society, credits Kris Spence – a noted Donald Ross restoration specialist – with reclaiming the original Ross character and style that had faded over the years during a 2007 project at Forsyth.





About Forsyth Country Club

Opened: 1913

Course Architect:

A. W. Tillinghast (original 9 holes) 1918; Donald Ross 1923 & 1947; Kris Spence (restoration) 2007

Head Golf Professional:

Chase Adams, PGA

Lead Assistant

Golf Professional:
Chris Rycroft, PGA

Golf Course

Superintendent:

Matt Jones

Fast Fact:

Forsyth Country Club averaged 25,000 annual rounds prior to the pandemic, a number that jumped to 31,000 rounds in 2020 and 2021

Inside Forsyth Country Club:

Golf legends Babe Zaharias and Sam Snead once played an exhibition match here, and other notables to have played the course include Bobby Jones, Jim Nantz, Dan Jansen, Phil Ford, Muggsy Bogues, and Lawrence Taylor

It's not a long course by today's standards yet requires a great deal of thought about how to play each hole. **The approach shots are demanding, most of the greens are elevated, the bunkers are challenging,** and if you don't think about how you want to approach the pin, you're probably not going to be rewarded with a scoring opportunity.

— Rob Fowler, longtime FCC member and club historian for the Donald Ross Society

"Spence was able to restore the shot values Ross originally designed into the course that had been lost," says Fowler. "It's not a long course by today's standards, yet requires a great deal of thought about how to play each hole. The approach shots are demanding, most of the greens are elevated, the bunkers are challenging, and if you don't think about how you want to approach the pin, you're probably not going to be rewarded with a scoring opportunity."

Despite its relative lack of length, Forsyth is not a course that can be overpowered. Sixteen of the 18 greens slope from back to front, requiring golfers to keep the hole in front of them or risk peril.

Chase Adams, Forsyth Country Club's PGA Head Professional, describes the results of Forsyth's unique architectural alchemy this way: "Our course can go from a member-friendly, easy-to-walk, fun-to-play everyday course to a course that requires precision, proper shot placement, and navigation of sometimes diabolical Donald Ross green complexes."

FCC, being such a true and classic test, has notably hosted many amateur tournaments, including the Carolinas Amateur, Women's Amateur, Senior Amateur and NC Junior Championships. The 66th Carolinas Junior Girls' Championship will be held here in July.

Adams has a keepsake from the 12th CGA NC Amateur Match Play Championship, held at the club last year, that serves as a fitting description of Forsyth's reputation with players.

"The final match was particularly special," says Adams, "It featured Wake Forest teammates Cyrus Stewart and Davis Womble, who are both very familiar with our course. After the match, which Womble won, we hosted both guys and their families here that evening for dinner. We got a thank-you card later from Stewart that said it all about our course. It read: 'Damn, was that course playing tough, but fair.' I couldn't state it any better." ■

Michael J. Solender is a golf and travel writer based in Charlotte, N.C.

