

Par Fives — Risk and Reward



The 16th at Eagle Crest Resort

By John Bebow

The risk of being a Michigan golfer is having to shovel the driveway in that first fickle week of April. The reward, sometimes, is an early thaw and extra rounds in March. No matter the weather, by afternoon of April's first or second Sunday our location is awfully predictable — in front of the television, watching the back-nine heroics at The Masters.

History has taught us to expect thrills and spills from Augusta's par fives. Through the annual flurry of birdies and eagles at 13, we wince and remember Curtis Strange's second-shot dump into Rae's Creek, which started his fatal slide down the leaderboard a number of years ago. And as we honor Gene Sarazen's legendary double eagle at 15 in 1935, we chide Chip Beck's boring 1993 lay up, which sealed his fate as an also-ran.

"With a great risk-reward par five you want a hole where you can make a three or a four or a five or a six or a seven," says renowned, Toledo-based golf course architect Arthur Hills. "These are holes where every time you go for a green it's fraught with interest. The ideal examples are Number 13 and Number 15 at Augusta."

Augusta's a long way from Michigan, especially in early April, but we have our share of holes where eagles and double bogeys seem equally likely. With eyes toward spring, here are a number of Michigan holes where you might play the hero's role this year:

No. 16, Eagle Crest Golf Club, Ypsilanti

Water, water everywhere, and nary a drop to drink. Instead, a parched throat is the logical impulse after the first look at this short, 475-yarder at the Eastern Michigan University course. The drive must clear a marsh while avoiding heavy woods left and Ford Lake immediately to the right. A big, straight drive is half the battle. To get home in two, players must hit a very straight, very high long iron or fairway wood to a small, boulder-encased green. Oh, by the way, Ford Lake protects the green on three sides.

"If the risk pays off, you'll definitely have a makeable eagle putt," says Bruce Cunningham, men's

golf coach at EMU. However, Cunningham preaches to his players to play it as a three-shot hole.

"The fairway is so narrow that players who get in trouble off the tee seem to take more risk on the next shot," Cunningham says. "Then the hole seems to have a snowball effect."

Or a snowman effect.

No. 3, The Bear, Acme

If any Michigan hole resembles the tempting dangers of Augusta it might be this one. At 528 yards from the blues (472 from the whites), this is a softie compared to much of the brutal Bear. A good drive leaves the low handicapper about 200 yards to the green. But a creek cuts in front of the large putting surface and an eight-foot-deep bunker also yawns at you in front.

No. 14, Travis Pointe Country Club, Ann Arbor

When architect Bill Newcomb designed Travis Pointe he didn't envision the 518-yard 14th as much more than a decent par five.

"We knew the longest hitters could always get there," Newcomb says. "But now, with the better equipment every third player can get there."

A small round green is tucked in behind a pond and a tricky bunker complex. While Travis Pointe is a private country club, it has hosted many public tournaments. And in tournament play the 14th tee is usually moved up to induce risk-taking.

No. 5, Mistwood (Blue Nine) Lake Ann

Here's a chance for the average golfer to play the hero. It plays 479 yards from the whites and

the tee shot is a little bit downhill. Hit it into the 40-yard-wide fairway and you face an approach over a couple bunkers and a pond on the right to an 8,000-square-foot green. A lot of players go for it.

No. 9, Faulkwood Shores, Brighton

Gamblers will love this one because it's a great place to decide a skins match. On many weekends Faulkwood's nines are reversed so that No. 9 actually plays as the finishing hole. It's a welcome respite after one of the toughest collections of holes in the state. With a slope rating of 140 from the tips, Faulkwood offers only a couple breaks. On the ninth (or 18th on the weekends), a fairly open driving area tempts players to end the round with a bang. Once in the fairway, they face a Donald Ross-like visual hazard — a sunken creek which makes the green appear much closer than it really is. Avoid under-clubbing, clear the creek and a short incline to the green, and you'll face a flat putt for eagle.

No. 6, Pilgrim's Run, Pierson

Pilgrim's Run sixth hole is a perfect example of a risk-reward par-five. Design consultant Mike DeVries is rightfully proud of this hole that begins from an elevated tee that looks out toward a wide fairway bisected by a yawning bunker. A strong tee-shot will leave a player with a 220 yard shot to an elevated green with trouble lurking left and right. Eagles are possible here as are doubles, just the right mix for a reachable and daring par-five.

This is an edited reprint from the archives of the MG. John Bebow is now a reporter for the Chicago Tribune. MG