

Course Review: Sandpines Golf Links

As if Sandpines Golf Links hadn't won enough accolades since it opened in Florence in 1993, in August 2012 it garnered the prestigious "Best of Don and Pete Golf Oregon Golf Week 2012" award. Now that's saying something. Seriously, Sandpines was the consensus best course of the week by Don, Pete and friends Dave Cadd and Mitch Nosack. (Bandon Crossings was second.) We rented a vacation home in North Bend and played courses from Waldport to Brookings, excluding the five courses at Bandon Dunes.

Much like Salishan, Sandpines is a "coastal" course but not an ocean view course; at no point do you see the mighty Pacific. But you know you're at the beach, as the course is built on sand dunes and dotted with hundreds of distinctive sand pine trees. There are more trees on the front nine, as well as lots of water, while the back side is more open and is a "links style" layout — although, like many courses with the word "links" in the name, there are way too many trees on either nine at Sandpines to be a true links course.

Designed by renowned golf course architect Rees Jones, Sandpines is well groomed and meticulously maintained. There are all sorts of tee options, and you can play the course anywhere from 6100 to 7200 yards; par is 72. While the first part of the front nine is fairly tight, the course opens up after that and, generally speaking, there's forgiveness for tee shots that are only *somewhat* errant. That trend continues throughout most of the back nine; however, as you begin to wind your way home, there's more and more water in play. Over the finishing holes, you'll be less concerned about tee shots than you are approach shots.

There's also sand at Sandpines of the bunker va-



riety, both greenside and in the fairways. It's real, live Oregon beach sand, which means it plays pretty heavy. That takes some adjustment. Many of the fairway traps and water hazards are (at least) partially obscured, so if you're playing the course for the first time, you've got to be particularly observant. The greens at Sandpines are virtually perfect. They're fast, and you couldn't ask for a truer roll. Break varies hole-to-hole, and you've got to spend some time reading your putts.

There's also a day-to-day variable at play at Sandpines you may have to account for: coastal winds. The back nine, in particular, is susceptible the west winds blowing in off the Pacific given it has far fewer trees than most of the front. A stiff coastal breeze can easily add one or more clubs to each shot.

An interesting point of discussion during our round was the critter we saw on No. 15. It was a ways away from us, but looked for all the world like a fox. We don't know if fox are indigenous to the central coast or not, but we know there are coyotes everywhere in Oregon, so we concluded it was likely a young coyote pup. But later, we did read a Yelp review of Sandpines that included the note: "And we saw a fox!" Now, whoever wrote that review may not know a fox from a coyote from a cow, but it did add some credibility that perhaps we did see a fox after all.

Sandpines has an excellent clubhouse facility. The pro shop has a nice variety of clothing in particular, including a goodly amount of ladies' wear. There is generally always a "deal" or two to be found. There's also a very good restaurant on site.