

The End of a Chapter - A Decade of Transformation at Hawks Nest Golf Course

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Over the past decade, Hawks Nest Golf Course has undergone a strategic transformation and revitalisation, establishing itself as one of the most well-presented and professionally managed courses in the region. Driven by long-term planning, smart investment, and a skilled and dedicated team, the course has achieved vast improvements across all areas of operations, playability, and presentation.

One of the most visible and impactful projects has been the ongoing bunker redevelopment program. To date, 18 bunkers have been professionally rebuilt using Capillary Concrete and EcoBunker edging technology, with 11 more scheduled for completion in the coming years. This represents a substantial investment by the club, not only in capital but also in the future sustainability of course maintenance. The use of Capillary Concrete ensures excellent drainage and consistency, while EcoBunker provides durable, clean edges that significantly reduce the need for continual reshaping and repair. Importantly, all rebuilt bunkers are filled with premium bunker sand, further enhancing both playability and appearance. These new bunkers not only elevate the visual impact of the course but also reduce maintenance time and long-term costs, allowing staff to focus on other critical areas of course care.



This bunker transformation is just one part of a larger story of improvement. Turf quality and plant health have been significantly enhanced through better practices and improved resource

management. Key to this has been the advancement of the irrigation infrastructure, including the upgrade of modern field controllers and a central control system. These upgrades allow for precise water delivery, improving surface consistency while also promoting water conservation and sustainability.

The machinery fleet has grown markedly over the past decade, almost doubling in size. Where once a single surrounds mower was used to mow both tees and surrounds, with operators manually changing cutting heights during the day, the course now has dedicated mowers for each playing surface, allowing for more accurate mowing and healthier turf. Multiple fairway mowers now enable the team to mow all fairways in just three hours, compared to nine hours a decade ago. The addition of a larger, more efficient spray tank has reduced downtime between fills and improved the speed and precision of chemical and fertiliser applications.



A major step forward has been the acquisition of construction-focused machinery, including a Posi-Track and an excavator, enabling the team to take on complex in-house projects that previously would have required outsourcing. These machines have played a crucial role in bunker reconstruction, path preparation, drainage installation, and other earthworks—giving the team greater control, reducing costs, and dramatically improving project turnaround times. The club has also acquired two additional tractors, bringing the total to four—two of which double as front-end loaders, allowing the team to carry out earthworks, path preparation, and landscape reshaping internally. With the increase in staffing, the number of transport vehicles has grown from three to five, ensuring efficient movement of personnel and equipment around the course and supporting a more dynamic work schedule.



Another important initiative in recent years has been the implementation of a strategic root pruning program, designed to improve turf health, particularly in shaded or tree-heavy areas. Using a trenching attachment on the Posi-Track, the team has been able to systematically sever invasive tree roots that compete with turfgrass for water and nutrients. This targeted approach has had a noticeable impact on turf density and vigour, especially around fairways, green surrounds, and key tee complexes. By addressing root encroachment proactively, the program has also helped to maintain the long-term health of surrounding trees and minimise surface damage caused by unseen root growth.



Another standout improvement has been the evolution of our greens renovation program, which is conducted twice a year in autumn and spring. Over the past decade, the renovation process has been refined significantly, with the introduction of more effective practices, improved timing, and the use of hand topdressing for greater precision. These advancements have resulted in a dramatic reduction in recovery time, with greens now returning to full condition faster and healthier than ever before. The consistency and speed of recovery have not only benefited presentation but also allowed for better playing conditions for members and guests throughout the year.

Equally, the introduction of annual fairway renovations, including scarifying and hollow coring, has delivered a noticeable uplift in turf health, drainage, and playability. These practices, once considered too disruptive or logistically difficult, have now become a cornerstone of the club's maintenance calendar and are contributing to the long-term sustainability and presentation of the playing surfaces.



Staffing has expanded in line with the club's growth and the increasing demands of delivering a high-quality playing surface year-round. A decade ago, the course operated with just five team members. At the peak of redevelopment and improvement works, the maintenance team expanded to ten, including the addition of key specialist roles. These included a vegetation manager, responsible for tree management, mulching, and native landscape control, and a dedicated mechanic, whose full-time role ensures the growing fleet of modern machinery is maintained to the highest standard. This team structure has allowed the course to take a proactive, project-based approach to improvement, rather than being limited to reactive maintenance.

A proud milestone was the successful completion of trade qualifications by the club's first female apprentice, a significant step forward in gender diversity within the turf industry and a reflection of the inclusive, forward-thinking culture at Hawks Nest.



The scope of infrastructure improvements has been equally ambitious. Over 1,200 metres of new concrete paths have been constructed across the course, including tee-to-green paths on all par-3s, which have improved year-round access, reduced turf wear, and enhanced the overall playing experience. Multiple tee complexes have been redesigned and rebuilt, improving alignment, visibility, and aesthetics. Notably, a special tribute was created on the 13th to honour the During family, recognising their longstanding connection and contribution to the club. Fairways have been widened strategically to improve shot options and playability. At the

same time, bunkers that no longer fit the modern game or required excessive maintenance have been selectively removed.



Tree management has been a major focus during this period. Hundreds of tree stumps have been removed, and large-scale tree trimming works have been completed using a tub mulcher and elevated work platform in house. These efforts have improved turf health by increasing light penetration and airflow while also enhancing aesthetics and safety throughout the course. Together, the team has carried out extensive in-house landscaping and native vegetation control, helping to define playing corridors and improve sightlines.



The overall presentation and member experience have been significantly elevated through a range of additions and upgrades. New sand and rubbish bin boxes with ball washers have been installed across the course. Sponsor and tee signage has been modernised to reflect the professional standard of the club. New distance bollards have been installed to provide accurate and visible yardage information for players. These touches, though small individually, collectively contribute to a much more polished and consistent look across the course.

What makes these achievements even more remarkable is that all major construction and upgrade works have been completed entirely in-house. Using modern planning tools and maintenance software, the team has been able to plan, develop, execute, and record all works with efficiency, accuracy, and accountability. From path construction and bunker builds to irrigation installations and landscape works, Hawks Nest has proven that with the right people and resources, a member-focused course can achieve elite outcomes without relying on external contractors.

In addition to physical works on the course, strong relationships with key suppliers such as Living Turf and Toro have been integral to our success. Their support, product innovation, and technical advice have helped us meet the demands of modern course management. The introduction of Turfkeeper planning software has also been a game-changer, enabling greater operational efficiency, clearer reporting, and more effective resource allocation, ensuring the team works smarter, not just harder.

As Hawks Nest Golf Club looks to the future, it does so on the back of a decade of hard work, smart investment, and unwavering commitment from its course staff and leadership. With a strong foundation in place, a modern fleet, a high-performing team, and a clear vision for continuous improvement, the course is well-positioned for long-term sustainability and continued excellence.

Over the past decade, I've not only witnessed the course evolve, but I've grown alongside it, professionally, personally, and as a leader. I've undertaken ongoing external leadership and management training to support the needs of an expanding team and increasingly complex operation. I was proud to be nominated for Superintendent of the Year in 2023 and to have played a major role in the club being awarded Tournament of the Year for our 2023 Pro-Am, an event that showcased the exceptional presentation standards we worked tirelessly to achieve. I was also honoured to be approved to attend the 2021 Golf Industry Show in Las Vegas, though unfortunately that opportunity was cancelled due to COVID. That same period brought its own unique challenges, as we navigated staff shortages, evolving health restrictions, and ongoing uncertainty. Leading the team through those times, while maintaining operations, morale, and presentation, was one of the most testing but ultimately rewarding parts of my career.



Throughout my tenure, I've also been fortunate to attend numerous ASTMA conferences, including in Wellington (NZ), Melbourne, Brisbane, and Sydney, experiences that broadened my industry knowledge and helped bring new thinking back to the club. Supporting the professional growth of others has been equally important to me. A proud highlight was seeing Mel, then an apprentice here, selected to participate in the ASTMA Women in Turf Initiative at Adelaide Oval, where she helped prepare the ground for an AFLW match. Moments like this reflect not only the calibre of the people we've had on the team, but also the club's commitment to nurturing talent and promoting diversity within the turf industry.

I've contributed to long-term strategic planning and had more than 30 business case submissions approved by the Board, each resulting in lasting improvements to course infrastructure, equipment, or sustainability. These experiences, and the many lessons along the way, have shaped me into a more strategic, adaptable, and resilient superintendent, skills I'll carry proudly into the next chapter of my career.

That said, the path to this point hasn't always been easy. Alongside the many achievements, we've faced our fair share of challenges both environmental and operational. Nematode populations were recorded into the thousands at times, well above acceptable threshold levels, posing significant threats to root health and requiring a considered, long-term management approach. Disease pressure was extreme in certain years, particularly during summer months when Pythium root rot created high-stress conditions and demanded immediate response strategies. These outbreaks occasionally caused serious damage and tested the resilience of both the turf and the team.

Nematode Extraction Results	High								High
	Mod								Mod
	Low								Low
	Sample Count	50	0	0	0	2662	5	0	Sample Count
	Genus Threshold	750	2000	400	2000	50	200	1000	Genus Threshold
	Nematode & Genus	Ring - <i>Cricemella</i>	Root Knot - <i>Meloidogyne</i>	Sheath - <i>Hemicycllophora</i>	Spiral - <i>Helicotylenchus</i>	Sting - <i>Belonolaimus</i>	Stubby Root - <i>Trichostrongylus</i>	Stunt - <i>Tylenchostrongylus</i>	Nematode & Genus

Weather events presented ongoing hurdles, from prolonged droughts to periods of heavy flooding. But it was often the high winds and intense storms that demanded the most urgent responses, with countless hours spent on debris cleanup, fallen tree removal, and restoring the course to safe, playable condition.

Staffing, too, has brought its own set of challenges, particularly in the recruitment and retention of skilled personnel during a time when the industry as a whole has faced labour shortages. Maintaining a consistent, high-performing crew under these pressures is something I view as one of our most important achievements.

During this time, I also achieved Certified Sports Turf Manager accreditation through the Australian Sports Turf Managers Association. This nationally recognised certification reflects a high level of technical proficiency, leadership capability, and commitment to ongoing professional development. It was a personal milestone that underscored my dedication to excellence in turf management and contributed to the high standards we've maintained at Hawks Nest.

As I prepare to close this chapter and step away from my role as Course Superintendent, I do so with immense pride in what has been accomplished and deep gratitude for the journey. Hawks Nest Golf Club has been more than just a workplace, it has been a place of challenge, growth, and reward. The transformation we've achieved over the past decade is a testament to what can be done with vision, hard work, and a committed team. I leave knowing the course is in a stronger, more sustainable position than ever before, and I'm confident that the foundations we've laid will serve the club well into the future.

Thank you to the Board, the members, and most importantly the staff who have walked this path with me. It's been an honour.

