

# CHICAGO DISTRICT GOLFER

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## Illini's Golf Course Reopens after **Massive Renovation**; Urbana CC Reborn

**A** mere two years since The Atkins Group (TAG) donated more than 300 acres of real estate in southeast Urbana in June of 2020, **Atkins Golf Club at the University of Illinois**, formerly known as Stone Creek Golf Club, is now open to the public as the new home of Illinois' men's and women's golf teams. The gift from TAG, valued at more than \$15 million, was parlayed with a \$5 million anonymous gift and led to additional golf course renovations by **Drew Rogers**, an overhaul to the club's pro shop and the creation of the Illini player's lounge.

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— Renee Sloan, Illinois Women's Head Golf Coach

"It's always exciting when you have an idea about what something can look like and then you put some time and some energy and some resources into it, and to see it now, two and a half years later, at this point, and to know all that's gone into it, all the people who put so much effort into it means a great deal," said Illinois director of athletics **Josh Whitman**. "And obviously, just so incredibly grateful to the Atkins family for their generosity and allowing us to make this possible."

Major tweaks to the bunkers and greens were among the list of renovations to the property. The Better Billy bunkers underwent full reconstructions

with Pro/Angle Sand, while being strategically repositioned around the course. The top three to four inches of all 18 regulation greens, along with the main practice putting green, were cored and re-grassed.

"Well, obviously the bunkering, that was a huge, huge undertaking and that will definitely be an enhancement to the course for all players," said Illinois women's head golf coach **Renee Sloan**. "And the greens, the playability, [will provide] us with that competitive edge, that opportunity to really prepare for competition."

Preparing for competition is just one piece of the puzzle of the project. New tee sets were added throughout the course to not only enhance its playability for local casual golfers with seven total options, but also give the opportunity to stretch out the track to more than 7,500 yards with the hopes of hosting **NCAA Regional** events in the near future.

"That was the point of making it the length that we did," said men's golf coach **Mike Small**, when asked about the potential chance to host a Regional. "That was a big motivating factor."

Just down the road, **Urbana Country Club**, owned by Jacksonville Jaguars owner, **Shad Khan**, is celebrating its centennial year with a vengeance. Seven years removed from having just 132 members, Urbana unveiled a brand new \$25 million project last summer, which includes a three-story, 30,000 square-foot hotel and spa with a resort-style swimming pool.

Today, the club is home to 477 members and is in advanced plans to restore its 18-hole track. With the aforementioned Rogers already having done the new 11,000 square-foot putting green at the club, Rogers and Urbana had a master plan drawn up for a number of years before the COVID-19 pandemic pushed back the timeline.

"Drew's awesome," said golf course superintendent **Scott White**. "He uses the land really well. He's using little aspects of all the great golden-age architecture guys. It can be a Ross, it can be a Colt, it can be a Bendelow, too, but it's a mix of everything, and we've got some template holes that we're putting in."

With Rogers having done restoration and renovation projects at the aforementioned Atkins Golf Club, Glencoe's Lake Shore Country Club, Old Elm Club in Highland Park and many more throughout the Chicago District, Urbana is sure to be in good hands under Rogers' leadership with June 1, 2024 being the new targeted date to break ground. ●

—Jacob Bomeli

Urbana Country Club is celebrating its centennial in 2022 and is in the midst of working up a comprehensive renovation project that is slated to begin in 2024.



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