

# Bogey-man is on hole No. 8

## Kenston golfers take shot at Punderson's toughest

By TIM BLADOS  
Banter Writer

Players on Kenston's boys' and girls' golf teams have a love-hate relationship with hole No. 8 at Punderson State Park's golf course in Newbury.

The narrow, wooded, par-4, 420-yard hole, which slopes downhill for 400 of the yards, doglegs over a pond and terminates in a mound-like green. Punderson's signature hole deals a number of unexpected cards, no matter how one hits the ball, the players said.

"I think it's a great golf hole," junior Zack Bates of the most challenging hole on the Bombers' home course. "Every time you play it, it's 'Here we go again. It's time to buckle up.' You have to hit the first two shots very well and two-putt it." On a recent round, he said, he had to mark a "9" on his card as a testament to how challenging it is.

As difficult as the hole is, Leah Dancie, the Kenston girls' No. 1 player, said she appreciates the layout and its complexities. "I like hole No. 8 at Punderson. The approach shot to the green is very deceptive. You have to hit it just right," the senior said. If the ball is overshot, it will roll off the green, she said.

Trying to place the ball before the green usually will end up in the drink, since it will roll towards a water hazard that lies in front of the green, Dancie said.

"The water is very easy to hit into," said freshman Nicki Henry, who is enjoying her first year on the varsity squad. "It's a great water hazard." The hole tests players' skills and concentration, she said. "It helps you with accuracy and trying to hit your target. I like its technicality. It's a challenge."

"It's a tough hole," said senior Jeff Rudy. "It just requires a lot of strategy. He has to worry about making sure he hits the ball straight, he said, and a slight variation in his swing could send it into the trees or in the water. "If you don't hit your shot, you're going to get your medicine," he said.

Having a tough home course prepares players for most of the other courses they may encounter during a season, said Mike Rovtar, the girls' head coach, and Don Torma, the boys' head coach.

Both said the Bombers wouldn't be able to learn as much on the golf course if it wasn't for the encouragement of Punderson's head professional, Kip Freeman, who helps them hone their skills on such a notable course.

"It's a tough course for the girls. It's a challenging course," Rovtar said. "It's long in yardage. I think it's beneficial we get to play on that course."

From the championship tees, the course measures over 6,800 yards for 18 holes.

Punderson has been the home to the Kenston boys' team for about 15 years and for the girls since the sport was offered six years ago, Rovtar said.

"The course is long enough and challenging enough," Torma said of Punderson. "It demands all the best shots in golf. When you're done with 18 holes, you'll have used every club in your bag."

By the time kids reach high school, those that have the skills to make varsity and junior varsity often have good control of the ball and can hit good distances, Torma said. With his boys, he concentrates on the short game, because that is where players rack up strokes if they are not careful, he said.

Girls usually have more fluid swings, most likely because they don't have the mentality of wanting to "kill" the ball, Rovtar said. "I think guys, like anything, want to muscle it up. We try to see how far we can get it," he said. "With girls, I don't think they try to over-hit the ball. I don't know about how much technology plays a part, but, if you don't have the proper swing, it's hard to keep the ball in play."



Photos by Chris Meier

Freshman golfer Nicky Henry said the eighth hole at Punderson is a challenge with its technicality and "great water hazard."



Leah Dancie, the Bomber girls' No. 1 player, said the approach to the green on No. 8 is "very deceptive."



Kenston golfer Brian Boyd watched his drive take off during a recent match on the Punderson course.



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Torma said boys will usually out-drive girls, mostly because they can obtain higher club-head speeds due to their strength.

In his roughly 14 years of coaching golf, he has seen the quality of Kenston's boys improve, not because of better ball and club technology but because there are so many challenging courses in the area, he said. Kids also are playing more golf with the better opportunities afforded to them, Torma said. "It's a little bit

of technology. In Northeast Ohio, kids play a lot of golf."

Rovtar said the golf season starts in full swing the second week of August for Kenston, with only about a week of organized practice. The regular season lasts until about the first week of October and ends with the state tournaments a week or two before Halloween.

It's important for all golfers to maintain practice during the off-season, he said. Boys and girls that excel in the

sport play throughout the spring and summer and often hit at indoor driving ranges in winter to keep their swing sharp, he said.

Golf, like football, is usually played in almost any type of weather, except for heavy rain and thunderstorms or if snow covers the course, Rovtar said.

About two years ago, Dancie said, she remembers playing in a tournament in Massillon with lots of snowflakes in the air. While there was no snow sticking, it was a challenge to remain loose and relaxed, she said.

"It was cold. You have to stay loose. When it's cold, it's hard to relax, because you're so focused on trying to stay warm." While she loves the game, playing in those conditions can make you question why you picked up the sport in the first place, she said.

Bates said he got to experience playing a round at the prestigious Pebble Beach course about two years ago when he was visiting relatives in California, which was his favorite experience outside Ohio. While many things were eye opening, like the \$475 fee for a round of golf there, the experience was one he will never forget, he said.

"You only get to go there so often. There's something like 11 holes that are right on the ocean. It was a remarkable experience. It was very tough. There's not one hole you were disappointed to play," Bates said.