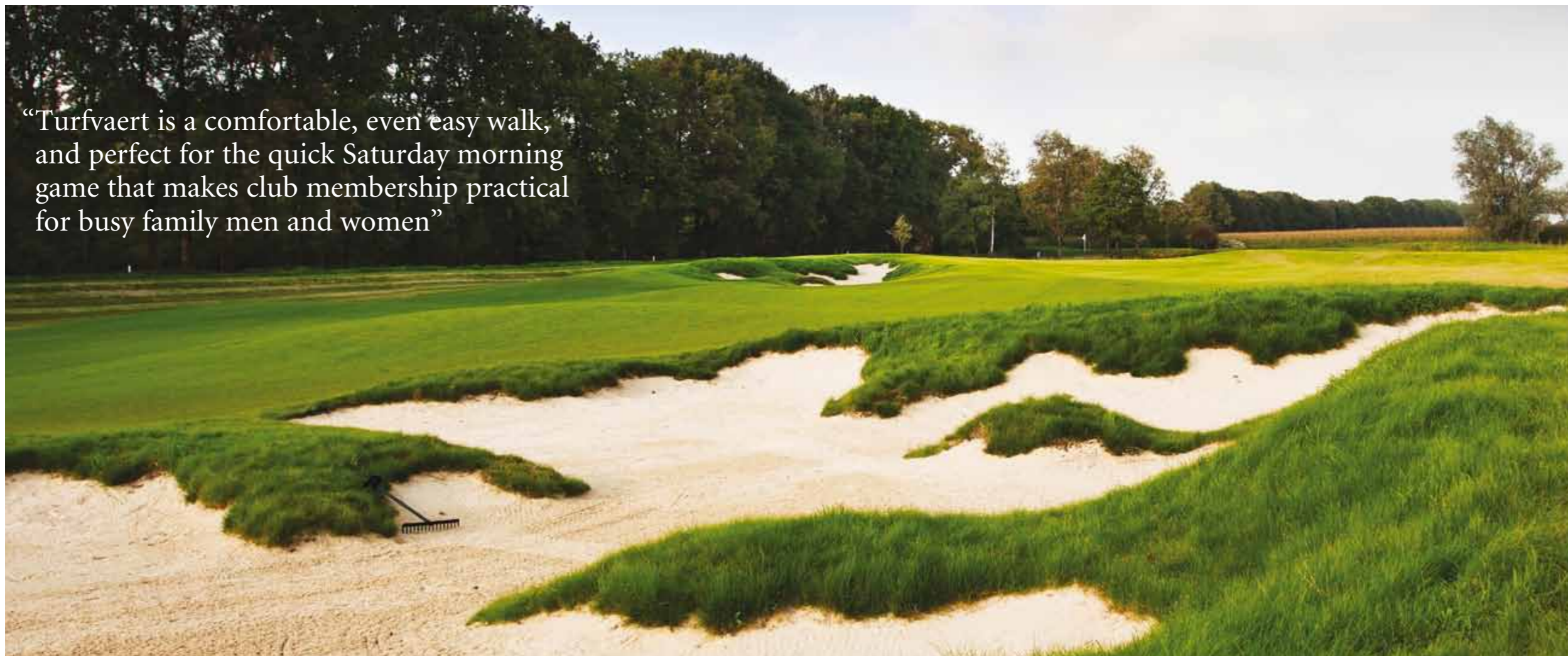


“Turfvaert is a comfortable, even easy walk, and perfect for the quick Saturday morning game that makes club membership practical for busy family men and women”



Turfvaert's par five tenth: though the course is not long, and the site small, it still demands strong hitting

Golfpark De Turfvaert

Rijsbergen, Netherlands

Low key, simple and successful: Adam Lawrence visits an interesting new Dutch course

Perhaps the most frustrating thing about the problems golf faces around the world is that the solutions are well understood, but as an industry we have not been good at implementing them.

Everyone in the golf business knows that, to grow the game, golf needs to be less expensive, take less time and be less difficult. Put two golf architects in a room, and they'll agree we need shorter courses with that can be played quickly, maintained for less money, and that are welcoming to beginners while still providing interesting challenges for those with more skill. “But our clients want ‘championship’ courses, so what can we do?” they will say.

Golf writers are as guilty. Our editorials plead for the game to be more accessible, but our pages laud long, tough courses that need a maintenance budget in seven figures.

So, here's a change of tune: a new golf course built for less than that seven figure maintenance budget – that has moved into profit within six months of opening.

Regular readers of *GCA* should by now be well aware that we believe something interesting is happening to golf in the Netherlands. Though it may be a stretch to refer to a Dutch golf boom, there is clearly still demand for the game in the country, and the last couple of years have seen a number of new openings sharing one common factor: economic success.

Although recent Dutch course openings have been spread between high end and mass market facilities, one thing that has been noticeable about the recent minor spurt of golf development in the country has been the existence of a few excellent case studies for the future growth of the game around the world. We profiled the new De

Stippelberg course near Eindhoven in the last *GCA*; another Dutch success has taken shape further to the west, near the city of Breda.

Golfpark De Turfvaert, is, on many levels, a fairly bare bones project. On a site measuring 49 hectares (121 acres), very small for eighteen holes in this day and age, Dutch architect Frank Pont has crafted a course measuring just less than 5,400 metres (6,000 yards). Playing to a par of 70, with six par threes and four par fives, the course will not be overpowering to those who have recently taken up the game, but nor will it be a walkover for decent golfers. It's a comfortable, even easy walk, and perfectly suited to the sort of quick Saturday morning game that would make golf club membership more practical for busy family men and women. It has a set of interesting holes that will keep regular players interested, but it's not so quirky as to deter

first timers. And, most remarkably of all, it was built for less than a million Euros.

How this came about is a story of careful husbandry of resources and the selection of a suitable site. Previously agricultural land, Turfvaert sits on pure sand under a thin layer of rich topsoil. This makes construction easy, and, crucially, enabled Pont to build his greens from the material on the site, a huge bonus given the cost of importing USGA-grade sand. The irrigation system was kept as simple as possible; just a single row of sprinklers down the middle of each fairway (Turfvaert has been designed to play firm and fast, so the irrigation system is really only a backup should nature fail to provide enough water). Although pushing sand around on a site is fairly easy, large-scale earthmoving adds cost: Pont kept the volume of sand moved down to a remarkable 75,000 cu m.

It is easy to build a cheap golf course, but very hard to build one that is both cheap and good. While Turfvaert is never – by intention – going to be a venue for the Dutch Open, Pont's design achieves its key goal, to provide an interesting game of golf for members and guests, very effectively. Use of native material meant the architect could afford to build large greens with significant contours, again making the course more accessible for beginners while retaining interest for regular players. One truly remarkable fact about the course is that thirteen of the greens slope away from the line of play, albeit only slightly in some cases: this makes an approach along the ground a more sensible play for many golfers, and challenges the better player to stop his ball close to the hole.

Standout holes include the very short par four second, less than 240 metres (260 yards) from the back tee. Four bunkers spread around the landing zone, plus another at greenside, force players to formulate a clear strategy before making a swing. As is often the case with such a short hole, the position of the flag defines the ideal line. The fourth, another relatively short par four at 320 metres (350 yards) gives a clear choice of the tee: either try to carry a large bunker eating into the left side of the fairway, which will, if successfully accomplished, leave a simple pitch up the throat of the green, lay back short of the bunker for a longer, tougher approach, or try to thread the needle to the right of the sand.

Though the course is short, Turfvaert won't give up a good score without some solid hitting. With four par fives, there is ample chance to swing the driver, and one of them, the tenth, is among the course's best holes. Pont likes old-fashioned features: alongside all those front to back greens, there are several bunkers surrounded by fairway, offering golfers a choice of routes.

Actually, old fashioned virtues are well represented at Turfvaert, both on the course itself and in its management. Like some of the other Dutch courses we have featured recently, the new course has been an economic success from day one, in this case achieving breakeven after only six months of operation. Membership has been capped off at six hundred, to keep space for green fee play, and management is being very careful with its cash, adding clubhouse facilities only as demand dictates. Sustainable is a popular buzzword in golf; if Turfvaert isn't sustainable, I'll eat my hat. **GCA**

GOLFPARK DE TURFVAERT

Architect: Frank Pont, Infinite Variety Golf Design
Contractor: Heijmans Sport en Groen
Irrigation contractor: Smits
Irrigation supplier: Rain Bird