

## Oakmont Country Club Oakmont, Pennsylvania

Architect: Henry C. Fownes (1903)

	Par	Yards	Rating	Slope
Championship	71	7255	77.5	147
Blue	71	6436	74	134

### Overall Description:

Much like Merion, Oakmont is a total golf experience-the club house, the golf shop, the operations of the golf facility, the caddies, the whole nine yards are steeped with rich tradition oozing from every nook and cranny. It is not just the impressive pictures of past champions who have won here like Jones, Sarazen, Snead, Hogan, Nicklaus, Miller, Els, Cabrera, Sheehan, and Creamer-it is not even the overwhelming appearance of the handwritten scoresheets from those events (little known trivia is that Calvin Peete finished fifth the year Larry Nelson won his U.S. Open here). It is the whole aura of the place, creakie floors, un-airconditioned locker rooms, the porches wrapping the clubhouse and looking out over the golf course, all of it makes this an authentic relic that cannot be replicated. When you go here you just have to take the time to meander around and take it in-breathe some musty air-look closely at the wood lockers that have been there since the depression-talk to the help-they know the traditions and are glad to share.

From the golf design side, Henry Fownes clearly accomplished his goal of making this one of the hardest tests of golf in the country. The large furrow marks in the bunkers are gone, but the lightning fast, undulating putting surfaces are there, the dense rough and the occasional heather field are there, the 160+ bunkers are there and in play throughout, the hilly terrain that takes a shot hit without confidence to places you would rather not know is there. The overall balance of an extremely difficult, fair test of golf is what you get. The modern equipment may give you the extra distance to shorten some of the long holes, but truthfully the test is in tactics and execution not in distance. Look at the list of winners-Melnyk, Nelson, Mahaffey, Sarazen-these were not men with prodigious length but men who hit it in play and can play around the greens. The secret to Oakmont is hitting it in the fairway off the tee and pitching and putting to save pars from below the hole.

From the blue tees, length very seldom seems to be a factor. Angle of attack or approach seems to always be a factor. The driving areas are visually expansive but are always confined by bunkering usually on two sides. You get none of the cloistered feeling of trees encroaching the playing area. There are plenty of big old trees but most are just background. Beside the bunkering plentitude, the greenside bunkers are very severe. With a sixty degree you can get out of all of them but getting close will be a challenge.

You cannot think of Oakmont without trembling at the thought of the warp speed of the greens. Stimpmeter measurements aside they are just flat out fast. I have heard criticism that the greens are too undulating considering how fast they are maintained and this is something I agree with. But it is a characteristic of the course and you just have to accept it. As troublesome as the downhill putts are I think the real challenge is hitting the uphill putts hard enough. On all courses with fast greens the differential in absolute speed between a downhill and uphill putt is way greater than on a course with slow greens and this differential will drive you

batty. You just want to smack yourself upside the head with your Odyssey every time you leave an uphill putt short-and you will do it all day.

Besides keeping your drives out of the rough, and this is a must to have any chance for pars, I think effective pitching and chipping is where the scoring is at. Again the fast greens will carry shots without conviction off to the aprons and you must be able to up and down from there to make pars you thought you deserved.

When you are done here you will likely feel beaten but not unfairly beaten just beaten because of lack of tactical conviction or shot execution. Like the Gold Course at the Golden Horseshoe this is a course to play again and again-it will tantalize you and occasionally treat you kindly, more often than not you will walk away shaking your head at what could have been. But then again that is the lure isn't it.

Hole-By-Hole:

#1 Par 4 482/441

The opening hole on the front and back are the number 3 and 4 handicap holes on the course. Yet besides the ranking they are both very playable and neither is the hardest hole you will play all day. Drive straight away and split the fairway bunkers that flank both sides of the hole most of the way down to the green. Get used to this driving regimen because it will be repeated fourteen times today. Now you have a steeply downhill shot at a green that slopes away from you. You need to land it short and let it feed on. No bunkering around this green-that is a rarity-but there is still plenty of challenge trying to get there and keep it there.

#2 Par 4 340/325

The first of five great short holes you will play today. Looks meek from the tee but there is quite a bit of side slant in this one. Drive at the left edge of the fairway where the rough cuts in from the left and let your tee ball of 200 yards feed to the right on its own. Now you have a shortish shot to a green that sits on a 4 to 10 angle and is very steep from back left to right front. The green sits well above and has three massive bunkers set into the hill protecting the approach to the front left half. You have to try to work your approach right to left up the slope of the green. If the pin is on the left missing left leaves a pitch down a slope that cannot be played effectively.

#3 Par 4 428/390

The first of the two Pew Holes but this one the pews on the left of the driving area do not seem in play. The bunkers on the right are in play but you want to drive aggressively anyway. You will then have one of the most severe uphill shots of the day coming up. The green is slightly plateaued to boot so hit an extra club on this approach. Big sloping green but totally accessible from the front. Greenside bunkering here is not a factor since it is well short of the green.

#4 Par 5 609/512

True Pew coming up. This is a par five that dogears right just off the Pews on the left. Again bunkering on the right is in play so the power slider is the one. Now the layup is very technical. There are bad bunkers on the right about 100-120 from the green but you really want to layup on that side since the access to the green is best from the right. There are two layered bunkers on the left that are tough to come over if you are on the left of the fairway on your second shot. This green is very long and sits diagonal from 5 to 11. There is a little hanging nook in the back left that is like firing into a phone booth. Very cool hole.

#5 Par 4 382/349

Another of the really cool short holes. You drive it to center over the hill between the bunkers. Again to have any scoring chance you must drive it in the fairway. Now the green sits well below you across a furry ditch and it surrounded moat style by bunkers all around with more fur to the right. Very narrow target but the short club should make this playable. Back pins are particularly tough because the green seems to fall off into the back bunker. The greenside bunkering is very deep so you do not want to miss this target. This is one visual approach shot from the top of the hill.

#6 Par 3 194/168

A spectacular middle sized three par-the green sits considerably below you and is ringed on three sides by bunkers. Picking the right club is a real challenge. The feel of this shot is similar to the approach on five but it is a good two clubs longer. The green tilts to the left so aiming at the flag will leave you an uphill putt from the left.

#7 Par 4 479/370

Medium sized par four with a very uphill driving area. You feel you have to swing hard to get it to the top of the hill but you don't-swing within yourself and get it on the fairway. From there the green sits below you on a 7 to 1 diagonal and it is probably a good club less coming in. The front is very accessible so the temptation is to bounce it short and feed on-especially if the pin is up front.

#8 Par 3 288/225

Somewhat boring and long par three and a half. The cross bunker in front is an optical illusion-it is a good fifty yards short of the green but then continues up the left side all the way in. The bunkers on the right of the green seem to have magnets-these are tough to play from. Take dead aim with a driver or three wood and let it go.

#9 Par 5 477/462

Last hole on the front is a short uphill par five. Again very uphill driving area-take a smooth swing and let the club do the lifting. From the top of the hill you can take aim over the cross bunker a good 75 yards from the green. If you feel you can reach this is a chance worth taking because it is probably your only true birdie chance all day. Green opens up nicely from the left. This is a massive green that shares its back with the practice putting green so don't be surprised if you are hitting your approach in what appears to be a crowd of people.

#10 Par 4 462/440

This hole is a long one but it is straight down hill. Split the bunkers that flank both sides of the fairway and you have a long shot that needs to land short and feed onto the green from the left. The green is sharply angled away from you so don't be surprised if your approach rolls through. This is a tough par to make-maybe a tough bogie as well.

#11 Par 4 379/328

Another of the cool short ones. You can hit a 200 yard shot from the low tee area to the top of the hill. You do not want to be inside of 125 since the fairway ends and the rough and a related nasty ditch begin. Much like number two this green sits up and is further protected by a humongous furry pits in front and on the left. The green holds well so be aggressive to the pin location.

#12 Par 5 667/562

Very cool par five-a bit of a twisting and tumbling affair. Very disorienting look from the tee. You need to drive a slider just off the right edge of the second bunker on the left-this will slip it in behind the bunkers on the right. Now you have to layup in front of a cross bunker but be aware that leaky shots right will end up in the furry drainage ditch on the right edge of the fairway. Green is very long and deep and is protected by bunkers on the left and right. It drops considerably to the back so again controlling your roll out on the approach is difficult.

#13 Par 3 183/153

Very nice, slightly uphill, visual par three. Bunkers short and right and short left are a problem you would prefer not to deal with. Pretty long kidney shaped receptive green. A mid-iron turning right to left up the center of the green is the shot du jour.

#14 Par 4 358/340

Climb the hill to the next tee of another cute short one. Hit the three wood here to right center of a fairway that has a school of bunkers on both sides. Now you will have a short iron into one very long green sitting on a 5 to 11 diagonal and sandwiched by bunkering. The back 15% drops off to a little shelf-this makes for a very interesting phone booth pin position. This is likely to be a good scoring opportunity.

#15 Par 4 499/434

This is a long and difficult one-actually three of the last four are pretty brutal. Drive it to left center adjacent to a set of mini-pews just off the fairway. You get a good look from about 200 at a long green slightly below you and oreoed on both sides by long bunkers and a select pot short and left. Landing it on the front third is probably the shot here and let it feed to the flag. Both Cabrera and Creamer played it that way when they won their Open's.

#16 Par 3 231/211

Full three wood here to a green that is protected right front by a deep bunker you must stay out of. This green sits diagonal to the tee so you must try to work it with your ball landing front left feeding to back to back right. This is a tough green to hit from this distance. The putting here is no bargain either since there is severe slope in the green from left to right.

#17 Par 4 313/296

A real peek-a-boo job here. Very short hole up hill that bends sharply to the left around a bevy of bunkers buried in the hillside. Three wood at the white oak through the fairway. Leaves a short 75 yard pitch at a very shallow green with halacious bunkers front and back. You need to hit this pitch with distance conviction and should end up close with a birdie opportunity.

#18 Par 4 484/430

Very demanding finish here. Elevated tee into a landing area that pitches right below you toward a pair of bunkers you don't want to be in. The center three lobe cross bunker-left lobe-is the aiming line off the tee. Now you elevate a long club over a cross bunker on the left well short of the putting surface into an undulating green sitting well above you. The front bunkers that protect from the right are a good carry. The people sitting on the porch staring at you with ice tea in hand should not make you nervous-they have either already finished what you are trying to finish or haven't yet started-either way they are more empathetic than you know.

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