

## **The Concession Golf Club Lakewood Ranch, Florida**

Architect: Jack Nicklaus & Tony Jacklin (2005)

	Par	Yardage	Rating	Slope
Blue	72	6440	72.7	146
White	72	5909	69.6	137

### Overview:

The Concession, a collaborative design between Jack Nicklaus and Tony Jacklin, was first opened in 2006 in the Sarasota area to be the centerpiece of a high end exclusive residential golf development. It gets its name from the fact that these two were the protagonists in a famous concession of a two-foot putt at the final match of 1969 Ryder Cup that resulted in the first tie in the match's history. In the annals of golf this goes down as one of the most gracious gestures of sportsmanship we have seen in our sport. The golf course was designed with match play in mind in hope that some day a Ryder Cup will be contested there.

With the downturn in the economy right after the course opened the residential sales floundered and they only reached about half of the 200 members they had planned on. Under this economic distress foreclosure loomed for the club and the surrounding residential real estate. In 2009 Bruce Cassidy, the wealthy owner of a mining construction company, rode in on a white horse and put together an investment group to purchase the golf course and the 520 pristine acres of land it sits on.

He subsequently finished the construction of a planned \$15 million dollar clubhouse and brought Nicklaus back in to make some course modifications to soften and make it a bit more playable for its members. The only rooflines you will see are the clubhouse, Mr. Cassidy's home, and a couple of palatial guest houses for visiting dignitaries. The result is an underutilized luxurious golf only facility with about 125 well heeled local, national, and international members.

Everything about the place is top shelf. The clubhouse is appointed throughout with historical memorabilia to make you stop and stare. Pro shop, locker room, bar, and dining facility are lavishly appointed and serviced with a casual air you would expect. From the moment you hand your clubs to the young men at the bag drop to the time you pull away at the end of the day, they provide you with everything you want for a great day of golfing with friends.

The 23 acre practice facility alone is to die for. Dual ended driving range sporting 10 target greens with full bunkering and Titlest Pro-V1s at every station. A state of the art short game area where you can practice up to 80 yard shots and a 14,000 sq. ft. pitching green with bunkers and pitching areas that replicate what you will see on the course. The practice putting green is 10,000 sq. ft. and has the same grasses, speed, and undulations as the course greens. You could spend a whole day tooling around this practice area working on your game.

With so much ground to work with Jack and Tony designed a course that has unique character for this part of Florida. The holes are framed with pines and oaks as well as low palmettos and pine straw. Water

comes into play on 15 holes and the bunkering throughout is generous. Controlling your direction is key to avoiding the high numbers on your scorecard. Fairways are Tiff Bermuda which can be maintained with minimal watering to keep them firm and fast. The greens are also Bermuda and have the fancy sub-air system embedded in their understructure to manage ground moisture and temperature to optimize the grass condition and support lightening speeds. Segmentation and tiering of these green complexes coupled with stimp readings of 12+ put this course in the championship caliber.

There are five sets of tees so it is incumbent upon you to listen carefully to the advice of your caddie and consider the day's wind condition to pick a set that will allow you to be competitive and enjoy your afternoon. They made the course eminently playable if you play with proper forethought. Most holes have distinct challenges presented but, with careful planning, there are alternative safer routes to play to avoid the dreaded stuff. Take a page out of the Scottish/Irish playbook-play a match with your golf mates and make the medal score secondary to maximize your enjoyment.

The fairway bunker constellations are enormous and set opposed to most of the water hazards. Generally the best line of play is close to those constellations but ending up in them can be as penal as the fish habitats. Take a good look at the yardage book depiction on each tee and plod a route of play that makes the most sense. What is cool about the bunkers is that the sand is imported "Jack" sand which means it is firm, avoiding plug lies, and very playable from the fairway or greenside bunkers as well. Most of the fairway bunkers have a foxhole character with a raised back edge so you can distinguish them clearly from the direction you are playing. Once you walk past them they seem to disappear into the greenscape which gives for clean and majestic appearance when you look back down the fairway.

There is an equal balance right and left challenges, which for Jack is unusual, so you are required to pick a line of approach and try to shape your shot accordingly. Fortunately they were generous in the design and provide bail out areas if the shot required is not comfortable and even some collaring bunkers and grassy areas to take some of the harshness off the forced carries required. Short and long hitters will both find what they like through the day-some of the most challenging holes are the ones where distance is of no advantage and articulate shot execution returns a premium.

As a collection of holes, the five pars are the coolest holes you play all day. Every one is a visual delight with protracted segmentation to give you many tactical approaches to playing them. In most cases your second shot choices are determined by your first shot result and often the best choice is not the obvious one. This is not a simple I can go for it in two or I better lay up. There are good lay ups and better lay ups and you may be abandoning your standard lay up distances depending on circumstance.

The par threes are the least memorable holes but in no way are they without interest. Fact is the tactical approach to every one of them will change dramatically based on the daily pin position and the prevailing wind. This is where you have to be careful of how much risk you take because missing on the wrong side will leave you very difficult recovery shots and an opportunity to waste valuable strokes.

Many of the par fours are double breakers for me-holes that change direction twice-once on the tee shot and in opposition on the approach to the green. Proper positioning off the tee makes the second shot considerably more manageable but getting to those spots can entail greater risk. In match play this really puts pressure on you to play smart based on what your opponent has done.

Since you are unlikely to see more than a handful of groups out there taking the time to appreciate the scenery and the wildlife therein makes sense. Beautiful birds can be seen throughout that compliment the flora and natural vegetation but there are alligators in the water hazards so don't go mindlessly plodding about if you hit a wayward wet one.

To play here you will have to make an arrangement through your pro or know a member who can host you appearance. This place is expensive so the beauty comes at a price. But the value is in the full experience-atmosphere, scenery, and an afternoon of memorable golf.

#### Hole-By-Hole:

##### #1 Par 4 382/366 yards

The look of this opening hole is typical of what you will see all day. Fairway framed by tall pines and short palmetto underbrush delineating the hole. Drive to right center just inside the right bunker to get a good look at the hole as it turns slightly left. Mid to short iron into a green that is open on the front left and ramps up to the right. Best approach to all pins is aimed at that opening to land on the front third and putt from there. Make a par here and you are in the right mind set to take on the rest of the challenge ahead.

##### #2 Par 4 398/355

The difficulty will start to build slowly. This dogleg right has a massive desert wasteland on the right corner that you cannot visit. Water hazard skirts the right side of the hole beyond the bunker and the last 100 yards in. Drive to left center for the best angle at the green set to the right nestled against the water hazard. They put a bunker between the hazard and the green but you really want to come in from the left to feed up a long green that follows that line. If the pin is in the back there is some bail out room long and left from where you can pitch. This is a very hard hole so don't do anything bold and stupid this early in the round.

##### #3 Par 5 505/487

The five pars are the most visual and tactical holes you will play all day. Every one of them is full of segmentation that provide choices-think carefully on each shot because course management is at a premium on the long holes. Drive over the left side of the sentinel oak that stands in the middle of the fairway. This will run out to left center and give you a look up the hole as it bends to the right. If you can carry your second over the cross bunker that begins at 150 aim at the next bunker in the center of the fairway at 75. Otherwise lay up left of the cross bunker. This green is a dilly-small, segmented, and tiered-you have to hit a lawn dart to stay on the section where the put the flag each day. There is a drop off on the front left, a perched shallow shelf on the middle right, and another shelf back left. Don't be surprised if you hit a good one and it starts wandering away from the flag. Recovery pitches are a challenge to themselves. A frustrating bogey is a likely occurrence here so just grin and bear it.

#### #4 Par 3 190/175

The par threes here are not particularly jaw dropping but they are very challenging. This one is slightly uphill tee shot across a grassy abyss to a green set on a 4 to 10 diagonal above a face bunker. This green does not have much depth so gauge your distance carefully. If the pin is middle or front aim at the front right and turn it onto the first part of the green. There is a functional pitching area provided short and right of the green. If it is in the back you have to take on the carry of the face bunker and hit an articulate one.

#### #5 Par 4 384/326

If your heart rate is still calm be prepared for a bit of a jump in the monitor reading. This is the #3 handicap hole and it deserves that distinction. Very visually intimidating from the tee as you have to carry your drive across the hazard to a landing area that juts out into the water. Aim a draw at the left edge of the right bunker and hit it solid. The landing area actually is plenty deep-just don't overcook the draw. The approach is pure chutzpah across the remainder of the hazard to a sliver of a green draped across the water's edge. There is some bail room deep and a bunker back right but the pitch back down will be dicey. If the approach is giving you heartburn there is some room to miss on grass short and right of the green.

#### #6 Par 3 144/123

A teeny par three this is one of my favorite holes out here. Short iron pitch across the alligator haven demands real precision to all pin placements. The green is tightly squeezed between a long fronting bunker on the right and collaring bunkers along the back. One more nasty pot on the front left corner for good measure. If the pin is on the front play to center and the ball will back it's way into the bowl that defines the front of the green. The back right pin is probably the hardest-I would aim to dead center and putt from there.

#### #7 Par 5 527/453

More five par drama unfolds here on a true three shot hole. You drive to a narrow landing area flanked by a long waste bunker all the way up the left and a nest of pots on the right. Aim at the bunker on the right and turn it slightly to feed into the center of the fairway. From there you get a look across the furry wasteland framed by a lonely pine on the right to a small green perched on a hill set against the waste on the left. This green is a firm table top and would not hold a long approach shot even if you can fly it there. Best shot is a middle iron lay up to the right into the elbow of the last turn of the hole at about 130. From there, with a short club in your hand, you will have to hit another very high, precise shot with serious spin above a couple of fronting bunkers. If you are daffy enough to go for this green aim right-there is a large pitching area to the right of the green from where you could make an up and down but anything left is a reload.

#### #8 Par 4 322/312

Prilosec moment for the big hitters, this is a really cool short hole that demands precise tactics on both shots. Tee ball is metal wood or hybrid to left center at the bushy tree through the fairway. Anything right of center will get blocked out from the green by the thin pines on the right. Now you have to hit a short club across a babbling brook that comes from the left, fronts the very shallow green, and wraps around the green on the right. The face of the hill between the green and the water is bikini waxed all the way around. Back edge of

the green has velodrome track banking to the right. Best approach shots are on the left using the back hill to feed across to the right. Far right pin is pure alligator bait.

#9 Par 4 386/372

You have a very unusual hole to end this side. Drive over the top of the pines in front of you to carry to a wide landing area on the right side. The landing area is notched to the right with a big waste bunker straight through on the left. If you succeed in ending up on the right the green opens from that angle with one yawning deep bunker on the left face of the green. The green is a diagonal shoe tongue that ramps back up and left so a draw approach is the shot. Time for a Powerade and some peanut butter crackers-take extra provisions, the back is even harder than the front.

#10 Par 4 345/300

The visual meter is about to take a quantum leap-the next four holes are drop dead gorgeous. The inward half is a ramped adrenaline rush from here to the end. Standing on this tee, the water on the right will catch your attention. Best drive is right of the bunkers through the fairway to a pretty generous landing area. Nice fade off the center of that bunker would be good. Green has a distinctive spine running across the center and a huge Himalayan bunker structure obscuring access from the left side. Best approach line is right to left-they provide a wide pitching area right of the green.

#11 Par 3 178/159

The next two are your best scoring opportunities on this side so try to focus. This middle size par three is more difficult looking than it really is-unless the wind is howling. The shallow green sits on a diagonal to the hazard but they provided a bunker between the water and the green to give you some safe haven. Big pitching area left and long so I like a fade aimed at the front left edge feeding on to the green to take the water out of play. Pin on the left is a scoring chance.

#12 Par 4 301/290

They call it a classic risk reward hole-I think the reward to risk ratio is very low. Fairway club right of center bunker leaves a short iron to an accessible green that runs away to the back left. Approach must be a checking pitch to the front third of the green that feeds slowly over the hump. The big hitters will take a straight rip at this one-just don't miss left into the schmootz magnet.

#13 Par 5 495/485

Another very memorable par five-zig-zag-zig three shotter-this is probably the most difficult green constellation of the day. View of the driving area is pure intimidation but hit a control draw just off the left of the bunker on the right. Lay up well to the left to get a good angle to the green tucked right behind a massive bunker. There is a low collection area left and just short of the green but that would be a tough elevation up and down. Forget reaching this in two, no matter what you have left in. There is no way to hold a long club on this perched green setting and anything in the front Sahara is death. Not much depth to this target so make sure you have a spinning short club in your hand for the approach.

#14 Par 3 166/154

Another seemingly innocuous par 3 from the tee but there are demons lurking in the subtle architecture of this hole. About 170ish across a hazard that is not really in play unless you Cuisinart one to the right. Green is long and narrow and sits on a 7 to 1 angle to the tee. Like the approach shot to #1 aim a cut at the front left third and feed one up the slope to the flag. The bunker left of the green contains potential havoc to your scorecard.

#15 Par 4 363/346

From here to the house you have one demanding finesse hole after another. The angled forced carry created by the hazard that flanks the driving area up the right is very intimidating. It will force your mind to want to play safe left but from the bunker constellation through the fairway on the left is a very difficult to play at the green. You just need to aim a soft fade at the bunker and cut it up the fairway without fear. The green is sitting up on a shelf to the left above pair of deep faced bunkers with a carved out low bail area right of the green. From the fairway hit an aggressive high draw into the right front third of the green and let it settle to the left on it's own. Any recovery pitches on this hole are extremely difficult because of the steep elevation you have to traverse at green side. Jack and Tony created very clever proportions to this hole.

#16 Par 4 398/358

This is a very sharp dogear left hole wrapping tightly around the hazard. There is no safe way to play this hole and still have a chance to make a par so either think wide right off the tee and lay up in front of the green or pull up your britches and play like a man. Drive is a draw at the bunker through the driving area that turns and works it's way up the hole. Now you have a harrowingly shot at a very narrow long green wrapping around and behind the end of the hazard. Missing right is no bargain. The ugly bunker arrangement in front left is actually not a bad place to miss. If you hit this green in two you have played two very good shots and deserve a par.

#17 Par 5 540/492

Another unbelievable visual par five-make the set complete. This is like clinging to the wreckage of your overturned dingy-you will have to deal with the water over and over between the tee and the green. Drive is a draw aimed at the bunker pavilion on the right that turns just off the left edge to work up the landing area. The view of the second shot alternatives is riveting. You now have to hit a bold lay up with the same right to left shape aimed at the bunker on the right at 137 to try to force it a little further up the hole to end up in the gap between that bunker and the one on the left at 85. The green is stuck to the left against the water with bunkers straddling either side for visual effect. The obscured look of the 110 yard shot into this green will make you very queasy.

#18 Par 4 416/356

What is left is a wonderful stout finishing hole to get to a tall Guinness. Best drive is left center at the edge of the second bunker to get an angle to a green setting tucked to the right against the water. Once again they provided some buffer with a bunker between the water and the green. Hit a hard one at the left bunker and try to fade it onto the putting surface. The bail out is short and left of the green.