

## George Wright Golf Course Boston, Massachusetts

Architect: Donald Ross (1936)

	Par	Rating	Slope	Yardage
Blue	70	69.5	126	6440
White	70	68.6	122	6096
Red	70	70.3	115	5131

### *Overview:*

A strong handful of renowned public golf courses exist in the states that represent the most virtuous commitment of their municipalities to providing access to high quality design to everyone. The George Wright Golf Course in Boston, an original Donald Ross design through and through, is one of these.

The Wright was built in the Depression period of the 1930's on the old Grew Estate that had been conveyed to the Department of Conservation of Massachusetts through the efforts of George Wright founder of the Wright and Ditson Sporting Goods stores in Boston. This major project of close to \$1 million was financed through the Roosevelt Administration's Works Project Administration. In what proved to be an enormous undertaking because of the rugged topography, the construction employed almost 1,000 people as it was completed over a three-year period opening for play in 1936. There is a unique local flavor to the artistry of this facility in that it included a three-mile long perimeter flagstone wall built by the Italian and Irish masons of Boston and a stunning French Chateau style clubhouse that belies a typical municipal golf course setting.

From the time it opened this course was well reputed and hosted many big local and regional tournaments. Among the best players it was considered an equal to the posh private venues of Boston. But time took its toll and after the war and a series of financial problems that ensued, it fell into disrepair and by the mid-1980's faced imminent closure. Against all odds, an assiduous lobbying effort by the Massachusetts Golf Association kept it in operation for the next 20 years. Finally in the early 2000's the powers that be in the city of Boston made the bold commitment to restore George Wright to the original quality and design.

The key to this effort was the arrival of head pro Scott Allen in 2001, who spearheaded the restoration effort, and the hiring in 2004 of Len Curtain, a greens superintendent with a special affection for the place, who grew playing the Wright. With the consultation of a Massachusetts course designer Mark Mungeum, together this group embarked on the long term project to peel back decades of neglect and bring this wonderful venue back to original glory.

Lots of trees were removed and the green complexes were restored to their original Ross shapes and surrounds. Fairway bunkers were relocated along with a few new additions to help the course meet the challenge of the contemporary equipment. Together they brought back the Wright to a course worthy of being designated as the site of the 2018 State Amateur-the first time in the tournament's history it will be played on a municipal golf course.

The first, ninth, and eighteenth holes are on the flattest portion of the property just below the clubhouse veranda so the course begins and ends on a fairly tame note. On the second tee, in spite of the abundant width of the driving area, you get the sense this is a tee ball position course as the green in the distance is suspended on an alcove shelf tucked in the corner of the property. From three thru fifteen the course is enveloped in a solitary cocoon and you won't see any man-made structures besides the clubhouse and the maintenance facility. It makes you wonder how it could be just four miles from the center of a major American metropolis.

Standing on the third tee the challenge is at hand as you are staring up the narrow hallway that defines this uphill and stringent five par. Keeping the ball between the hash marks off the tee, controlling the roll out, and finding the proper angle of approach for the day's pins into these Ross green complexes will determine how your scorecard will fare today. It goes without saying that it will be peppered with some high numbers but you have to accept them and remain aggressive to balance the outcome.

One thing you cannot fail to notice is that the holes are often lined with rock outcroppings or tall mounds. These mounds were created by covering the piles of rocks rendered from the fairway demolition and you can begin to appreciate how much went into discovering playable fairways on this severe and rugged terrain. The devil is in the detail as you can see in the *Hole-By-Hole Analysis* below, the contours of five through twelve in particular will challenge your tactical instinct trying to find the line of charm.

*Note: If there is someone manning the dog-at-the-turn cart between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> tees I recommend well done with relish and mustard. The homemade cookies are not a bad chaser either.*

As an aside, the par threes may be the most interesting holes on the course. Every one of the four stands apart in visual distinction and precise shot making is demanded. Not one of them is over 190 yards yet playing the four of them anywhere near par is a major accomplishment. The Ross bunkering and segmenting of these four green complexes will sustain vivid images in your mind when you rehash the day's journey later staring at your dark bedroom ceiling.

The inward nine takes up right where the last one ended with roller coaster elevation changes on the first three holes. Be cognizant on all three of these not to drive the tee ball too far and overreach the best landing spot for the approach. As you can read in the detail the blinded approach shot into the tenth green takes serious visualization. The approach into the eleventh will take a different kind of creativity as it will take all your ground skills to give yourself a good scoring opportunity there.

If you reach the thirteenth tee with minimum scorecard damage there is great opportunity to make up ground on the way to the house. This hole is one of the most visually pleasing all day but you have to hit two very articulate shots to avoid the hazards that haunt the hole from tee to green. What follows is a challenging uphill par three followed by a stunning three-shot par five that should give you a good chance to apply some salve to the scorecard.

I would be remiss if I did not give a shout out to the Mt. Rushmore green complex of the sixteenth hole. No course architect would even consider building a hole like this today, but it is just flat out fun. From the base of the hill where your drive will end up it looks like you need to hit one over George Washington's left eye and land it on the crown of Thomas Jefferson's head. That is kind of what you have to do...long or Roosevelt right is no good at all.

The two holes that bring you back to the house are very interesting. The short par three seventeenth is one of the truly quaint looks of the day. Encircled by sand it takes a lawn dart to give yourself a good birdie chance. The home hole is a level walk on ground similar to the first, but the green is very deep with severe contour so you must focus to get your approach all the way to the day's pin.

When it was said and done, I found the George Wright an amazing municipal golf experience, right down to the clubhouse building and the players Bar and Grill. Linger for a cold Samuel Adams and some nachos, check out all the Boston sports memorabilia on the wall, and savor what has been a wonderful day of old style golf at a very accommodating price.

### *Hole-By-Hole Analysis: (Blue/White)*

#### #1 Par 4 377/367 yards

The first hole gives you plenty of elbow room to start. Tee shot is tree lined on the left and with a pair of layered furry-browed bunkers on the right. Green sits slightly raised tipped back to front and with a fall off to the left behind a big mound. Best approach probably would be left to right to work against the hill contour.

#### #2 Par 4 321/313

This tee shot here is framed by the overhang of an imposing oak on the left and a large Hersheys Kiss mounding on the right. If you hit it around 220 you have a look up to a raised ledged green tucked up to the left over a yawning face bunker. Plenty of bail room right of the green, if you don't have a clear sight line to the flag, which will accommodate a recovery pitch across to a center or left pin.

#### #3 Par 5 515/480

To me this is a pivotal hole on the outward half, it requires absolute control of your towardness from the tee to the green. Wandering off the straight and narrow can lead to a double in a heartbeat. The uphill tree lined corridor feels very narrow off the tee. Play to center and your lay up is on the left side of the fairway between and 100 and 75 yards from the green. This green complex is high atop the hill behind a pair of fierce bunkers set into the face of that hill. The green surface is very small and there is really nowhere to miss, so playing middle makes the most sense for all flag positions.

#### #4 Par 3 165/150

The first of four par threes has a green on level to the teeing ground, but it is a full carry across a low area from which recovery is problematic. The green hovers above deep bunkers on all sides and tilted from 2 to 7. With the back hill covered in long fescue, long off the tee is no bargain. Like the last hole, just forget the flag stick and aim to the middle of the green.

#### #5 Par 4 412/400

This is a tricky dog leg par four set along the high point on the property. You will detect a flat top plateau on the left of the crown of the hill-this is your aiming point. But beware, you cannot go past it because it falls off

to the oblivion through the fairway on the left. Aim your tee shot of about 210 at the right edge of the plateau and expect it to drop slightly right as it hits the hill. From there you have about 200 yards across a plunging slope to a green that is semi-blind below. The approach shot should be played 10% less than the yardage as you let it land on the down slope in front and feed onto a green that falls front to back and to the right. It may appear on this approach that you can aim safely left going in but if you miss slightly on that side your Titleist will wander down among the trees to an area well below the green. Da-da-da.....da-da-da.....making a four here is a Sportscenter Top Ten Entry.

#### #6 Par 4 395/360

As evidenced by the rock walls that remain on the left and the mounding on the right of the green, this teeing corridor took some serious detonation to carve out a fairway from what must have been a massive stone faced incline. Play the tee shot to left center off the fairway bunker to get a look at the green that is tucked up to the right into the side of the hill. A steep faced bunker is buried 30 yards short of the green on the right with another greenside bunker of the left. The green counter leans out of the hill falling front to back toward 11 o'clock.

#### #7 Par 4 400/360

You have now circled back around to behind the fourth green. This next par four is a fairly long tumbling affair once you clear the driving area. Play your tee shot to the left on top of the hill and not beyond or you will have to play an approach off a severe down slope. You cannot miss to the right as the land falls off sharply and will leave with blind shot to the green. From the top of the hill you will have a manageable approach shot that plays down a log flume hill the last thirty yards obscured by a brow ridge across the fairway masking the green. Best play is a low punch shot just over that ridge which will feed onto the putting surface. No bunkers in the way but the ball will tend to wander to the right as the green is angled away from the hill on the left.

#### #8 Par 3 185/165

Another up hill three-par plays longer than the distance indicates. Green surface is blind to you as it rests on top of a hill with a dramatic embankment fall off left. There is open access to the green with a short grass run up but deep bunker right and another bunker left will capture a timid approach. Play into the middle of the green since there is a retention grass moat that wraps the back of the green. The green tilts 11 to 5 and you want to leave yourself an up hill putt to keep the speed under control.

#### #9 Par 4 453/440

The next two holes are very strong. This one gives you little wiggle room off the tee as you need a strong right to left draw that follows the line of the hole over the hill in front of you. If you have kept it between the hash marks you have a 200ish shot off the down slope to an accessible green set slightly to the left into the foot of the hill below some towering oaks. This green is steeply sloped back-to-front and to the right so a right-to-left approach is in order to counter the contour. There is a bit of a false front so do not be surprised if you have a tricky elevation pitch and putt to try to save the par. Take a second as you approach the green to appreciate the elevation look to your left of the back of the clubhouse and veranda up the hill.

#10 Par 4 462/435

Facing another very stiff challenge here, this is a severe dogleg left but you really have to respect the driving line and aim to center to make sure you leave yourself an clear path to the green on your approach. Once out in the center of the driving area walk to the crest of the hill to find your line to a green that sits at the bottom of a steep hill. A long narrow undulating stepped green makes getting your blind approach shot into the proper section a chore. No question it plays a good club or more less down the hill. Best miss would be short leaving a pitch and run up the ramp to the day's flag.

#11 Par 4 362/347

Major shift in gears as this may be your best scoring opportunity on this side. From the raised tee adjacent to ten green you are driving back up the steep slope you just came down. There is a sizeable rock outcropping that provides a good line off the tee but you can drive through the fairway if you hit it too long on that line so I like a Calc Power Fade if you own one. From the middle of the fairway atop that hill you are now looking down to a green slightly below you across a dip and wedged into the hill on the other side. The wall shelf green is framed nicely by the stone wall that stretches behind the green cordoning off the maintenance facility. There is one deep bunker below the right side of the green that can collect timid shots and present a very difficult up and down. I think it takes a creative approach shot, maybe using the ground as your friend, to keep the ball below the hole and give yourself a chance for a good score.

#12 Par 4 412/399

This now gets very interesting. Hiking up to the 12<sup>th</sup> tee you are standing on one of the highest points on the course looking down a narrowing driving area in front of you. Your real problem here is that you cannot comfortably hit it beyond about 220 or you go over the edge of the fairway and will end up in nasty long grass of the back side of hill with little chance of negotiating a shot at the green. From the top edge of that ridge you probably have about a 200 yard bungee cord drop to a beautiful green complex that sits behind a stream crossing the fairway about 50 yards out. This is as visual shot you will witness all day so enjoy what you see as the ball leaves your club and plunges down toward the green. The green has plenty of contour and flows left to right as it works it's way back. Making par here is likely to be a pitch and putt affair.

#13 Par 4 390/369

This is another drop dead gorgeous hole with lots of intimidation tee to green. The first is a pond in front of you that really should not be an issue, it is the two ponds down the left that you cannot see that are the real problem. Drive should be up the right center to get a look at the green complex that rises out of the fairway. This green has a severe false front as well as a false left side so it is really the center right of the green that is your target on the approach. A very deep green you can expect to have a long uphill lag putt once you manage to get on the putting surface. An elevation pitch is likely here, just make sure to put enough intention on it to run all the way to the hole.

#14 Par 3 191/182

Three story walk-up to the next tee, but what you see when you get there is awesome. Trees frame a demanding green complex that is raised and hangs off the hill on the right. A false front will reject any shot that does not make to the middle two thirds of the green. Deep bunker short left of the green is an obvious no-no. It is very likely you are going to have a dicey pitch and putt to save a par here.

#15 Par 5 510/493

Somewhat like the tee shot on 12, you are aiming at the brow of a hill in front of you, but this time there is narrow fairway patch on the left that can feed you drive to friendly short grass below the hill. If you are out of range of the green the lay up is just right of the big oak on the left to an attack distance 100 yards out. The green is set into a hill behind a pair of deep faced bunkers and in front of the stone mason's wall that defines the edge of the property. This approach is one of the prettiest looks of the day in spite of the retention netting you see protecting the neighbors from the long ball. The green leans toward you so it should hold any length approach nicely.

#16 Par 4 340/318

Maybe the only silly hole on the course but is quaint in a kitchy sort of way. This is like playing up Mount Olympus into a very small foyer. From the raised tee you are aiming center of the fairway below at the foot of Mount Olympus. This very small green with one deep bunker short and right stands on top of the mountain peak and, as mentioned in the Overview, there is really no place to miss. Approach shot plays uphill so add the extra club to compensate and do not let it wander. Middle of the green is always the place to be on this tough putting surface.

#17 Par 3 170/158

The final three-par has another beautiful green setting about level to the teeing area across a low. The wind is usually what makes this hole so difficult to judge. The green sits slightly perched above four deep faced bunkers so it is critical to carry it all the way to the surface. Find your ball in the green side bunkers and you will have to hit a high lofting shot to recover. Oh, don't forget to keep your ball under the hole.

#18 Par 4 380/360

The day ends with a tree lined, slight dog leg left hole that forces you to keep the ball down the middle in order to avoid the fairway bunkers on the right side. Creek running across the fairway 75 yards from the green comes into play only if you hit a poor tee shot. A deep bunker on right side of green makes playing your approach shot to the middle of this long green a premium. The clubhouse sits perched on the hill above the green making for a very distinguished looking finish.