



D'TIME WITH D'AMATO

## Celebrating its 100th anniversary, Koshkonong Mounds CC in Fort Atkinson will never get old when it comes to playing it

By GARY D'AMATO, APRIL 4, 2024

FORT ATKINSON — Koshkonong Mounds Country Club was a nine-hole course when I attended UW-Whitewater in the late 1970s and, though I was a certifiable golf nut and the course was a mere 11 miles from campus, I never got around to playing it.

More than 45 years later, it remained one of the few public courses in southeastern Wisconsin that I had not played. I finally checked it off my list Saturday, beating an early April snowstorm by three days.

Now I wonder why I'd waited so long. Koshkonong Mounds is a collection of strategic holes threaded through old-growth trees and up and down sizable hills. It's a thinking golfer's course, one that rewards good decision-making and proper execution. Birdies are possible on many holes, but so are double-bogeys. No two holes are alike.

The highest compliment you can pay a golf course is that you'd never get bored playing it. That's Koshkonong.

"I think the best way to describe this course is that it's a hidden gem," said Mason Kent, the general manager and director of golf. "It's one of those courses that can get you a little bit the first time but once you've got the knowledge and you know where to play, you're definitely going to improve your score.

"If you hit good shots you're rewarded and if you hit bad shots, well, then you're going to be penalized."

I had planned to walk and carry my clubs, but Luke in the golf shop looked me over and suggested I take a cart. I'm glad I listened. The elevation changes were significant throughout, but particularly on the steeply uphill approach shots on the par-5 seventh and 18th holes.

The temperature was 41 degrees when I teed off, the wind was blowing and the turf was soaked from a Friday downpour. A couple of low spots in the fairways had standing water, but I only had to take relief once. To my surprise, the course was busy. A few groups cheerily waved me through, and I finished in 2 hours 15 minutes.

I played the course at 6,120 yards — it's 6,449 from the back tees — and found that it played much longer than the scorecard yardage, owing to the soft turf, the wind and the cold air. My hybrid and 5-wood got a workout, I had to hit driver on the 190-yard par-3 13th, which played into the teeth, and came up 5 yards short.

The greens at Koshkonong (Ojibwa for "where there is heavy fog") are not overly contoured, but several of them tilt sharply. I missed the green left on the 338-yard par-4 second hole. That was the wrong side to miss. I hit what I thought was a good chip and watched my ball roll 30 feet past the hole and into the opposite fringe. Gravity always wins.

The green on the 177-yard par-3 fourth also is canted from left to right. Thankfully, I missed that green short and right. I would not have wanted to chip from the other side.

There are some really good holes. The 423-yard par-4 third (a stout 444 from the tips) features a downhill tee shot with out of bounds on the left and water on the right. The second shot is uphill, with OB left. I was happy to make bogey.

The eighth hole is a short par-4, just 322 yards from my tee, but the approach from the end of a plateau fairway is downhill to a small green, with water short and right.

No. 10 is a visually intimidating 175-yard par-3, rising to a small, elevated green, with out of bounds left.

“You can’t miss left but if you go right that second shot is awfully difficult,” Kent said. “It’s a hole where you step up to the tee and say, ‘I better hit a good one.’”

He could have said the same about several others.

No. 18 is just 451 yards from the back tee but it’s not a pushover par-5. It’s a fairly tight driving hole, and if you’re not long enough to go for the green in two (present company included), the short third shot is straight uphill to the smallest putting surface on the course.

When you crest the hill, you’re greeted to a stunning view of 10,595-acre Lake Koshkonong, once a shallow marsh that was choked with wild rice and celery — an important food source for Native American tribes. The marsh, which became a lake when a dam was built in 1851, was known as one of the premier duck hunting destinations in the United States.

Koshkonong Mounds is celebrating its 100th anniversary. The first nine holes opened in 1924 and the course was expanded to 18 holes in 1981. On Saturday, a timeline was unveiled on a wall in the clubhouse and some of the older members were on hand to answer questions.

The course owes its name to 17 intact Native American effigy mounds on the grounds, two of them flanking the 18th green. The mounds, built by semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers, date from 300-1300 A.D. and are among the best preserved in Wisconsin. A self-guided walking tour starts near the clubhouse.

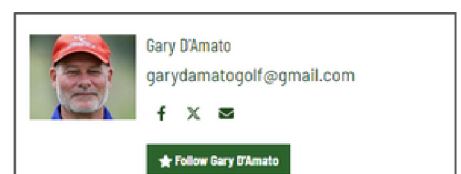
Koshkonong Mounds has a vibrant membership but is open to the public. Weekday rates are \$59 for 18 holes with cart in the shoulder seasons (opening date to May 12 and Sept. 30-Oct. 31) and \$67 in peak season. Weekend rates are \$70 and \$79.

The members are proud of their course, and rightfully so. Several of them approached me in the bar after I’d finished playing and asked, “So, what did you think?” I came away with a strong sense of community.

“Everybody is so supportive of one another here,” said Kent, a Fort Atkinson native who once played on the high school golf team and now coaches it. “I think that speaks volumes about our membership. It’s just who they are and it’s who we try to be as a golf course and as a country club.

“We have a lot of days when we show up as staff and you feel like you’re not even at work. You feel like you’re at an awesome gathering. We’re fortunate to have a lot of great people here.”

Great people, and a really good golf course.





The approach on the par-4 eighth hole.  
Wisconsin.Golf photo / Gary D'Amato



The view of Lake Koshkonong from the 18th green.  
Wisconsin.Golf photo / Gary D'Amato



A timeline of Koshkonong Mounds Country Club's 100-year history was unveiled in the clubhouse on Saturday, March 30.  
Wisconsin.Golf photo / Gary D'Amato

## D'Time Rating


Koshkonong Mounds CC

Rating date: March 30, 2024 (Early Season)

The rating is done on a 10-point scale, with 10 being the maximum score in each category and 70 the highest possible total.

Overall course conditions takes into account such things as the condition of fairways and teeing grounds, the height of the fairway grass and rough and the firmness of the turf. Quality of greens refers to smoothness and speed of the putting surfaces. Playability is a subjective measurement of the average golfer's ability to enjoy the experience based on the number of tee boxes, width of landing areas, speed of greens, number of forced carries and pace of play.

- **Overall course conditions:** 7.5
- **Quality of greens:** 8
- **Aesthetics:** 8.5
- **Playability:** 8.5
- **Variety of holes:** 9.5
- **Service:** 9
- **Value:** 8.5
- **TOTAL:** 59.5



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A pair of Native American effigy mounds flank the 18th green.  
Wisconsin.Golf photo / Gary D'Amato