

The toughest 9 holes in Metro golf

Written by Mark Dukes

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Fall high school golf, that inconsistent season that begins in brilliant warmth and often ends in blustery and cool weather, is only a couple weeks from getting under way. Metro golfers play a variety of courses during the season and, therefore, encounter some very interesting holes.

The four Cedar Rapids municipal courses – Ellis, Jones, Gardner and Twin Pines – along with Hunters Ridge and Airport National all will host high school events this fall. All have their share of challenging holes, all of them influenced by weather conditions.

Here's one person's view of the Toughest Nine Holes in the Metro area (with two criteria: every course must be represented, and country clubs are excluded because not everyone has access to them):

9. GARDNER #8. This pick may be influenced by my personal perils because I can't remember ever hitting this green in regulation. It's a fairly straightforward par-3, a downhill shot measuring 218 yards from the blues. The green is guarded by a marsh on the far left and a couple bunkers. It's a wide, narrow green with a lot of undulation, depending on the pin placement.

8. TWIN PINES #16 – This 401-yard par-4 can be even more difficult if the wind is blowing from the south. A dogleg left, it requires a well positioned tee shot that favors the right side. The second shot is blind to an accessible green. Not overly difficult but it requires two well-struck shots.

7. AIRPORT NATIONAL #15. The scorecard shows it as a fairly benign 162-yard hole. But the green is elevated severely from the tee box, requiring a shot that is all carry. Depending on the wind, a golfer could hit anywhere from an 8-iron to a 4-iron. Miss the green left or short and bogey is almost assured.

6. GARDNER #10. This hole always looks and plays longer than its 420 yards, unless you can bomb a tee shot. Trees line an otherwise generous fairway. Depending on the tee shot, you're

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looking at a mid- to short-iron second shot to a green that is accessible. But the pin placement can make it a difficult par.

5. HUNTER'S RIDGE #16. A long iron or fairway metal is required on this 201-yard dandy. You must thread your tee shot between trees that guard the green and must avoid bunkers short and left. The green is slightly elevated from the tee, making it a tough carry. It's also a big and sloping green, making par an awfully good score.

4. ELLIS PARK #17. This 594-yard hole requires considerable thinking. From the tee box, there are two creeks running through the fairway, so often something less than a driver is the shot. If you find the fairway, you must thread your second around the dogleg to the left. The approach is to a sloped green guarded by a pond on the left. A birdie is possible but also a bigger number.

3. HUNTERS RIDGE #17. This can set up to measure anywhere from 544 to 613 yards. A good drive is imperative, as water lurks on the left and clumps of trees guard the right. The water continues down the left-hand side all the way to the green, and bunkers invite problems to the right. Two well-struck shots will give you an opportunity for a successful approach and a good score. But negotiating those first two shots is difficult.

2. JONES PARK #16. The ultimate thinking man's hole, a 526-yard par-5 with trouble lurking everywhere. It's a very narrow fairway with water running down the left side and another pond on the right that could swallow a wayward tee shot. The challenge for your second shot is to lay up to within 150 yards or try to clear a waste area. Most prefer the layup. An uphill third shot isn't any bargain either, with trees guarding both sides of a green that is very deep. A par will feel like a birdie here.

1. ELLIS PARK #7. This hole is just plain hard. It can play as long as a 463-yard par-4, and almost impossible with wind in your face. A good, long drive is required. Then it's an uphill second to an elevated green. Miss to either side and your ball may be in the trees to the left or on the road and out of bounds to the right.

Honorable Mention – Hunters Ridge #9 and #18, Jones Park #4 and #12, Gardner #12, Ellis Park #12 and #18.

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