

THE VALLEY'S DREAM 18

If you love golf, this could be your dream course. The Bee asked readers, players and pros for their help in assembling the central San Joaquin Valley's Dream 18 golf course. Holes were chosen for difficulty, beauty or popularity, and many combine all three elements. Distances listed are from the longest tees,

but all these holes have shorter tees for golfers of all levels. We have divided our Dream 18 geographically, with North Valley holes included in the front nine and South Valley holes on the back nine. A list of 18 holes you can play, from courses that are open to the public, appears on Page C8.

FRONT NINE

1 San Joaquin Country Club, Fresno Hole No. 1, 419 yards, par 4



THE SKINNY:
One of the Valley's most scenic holes. You tee off from a bluff above the San Joaquin River, you're staring at palm trees and a beautiful fairway. You're ready to launch a drive that will sail a long way – but it's your first swing of the day.

THEY SAID IT:
■ "It's a very difficult starting hole because you are not warmed up."
– Vicki Mathiesen
■ "You're immediately intimidated." – Mike Firpo

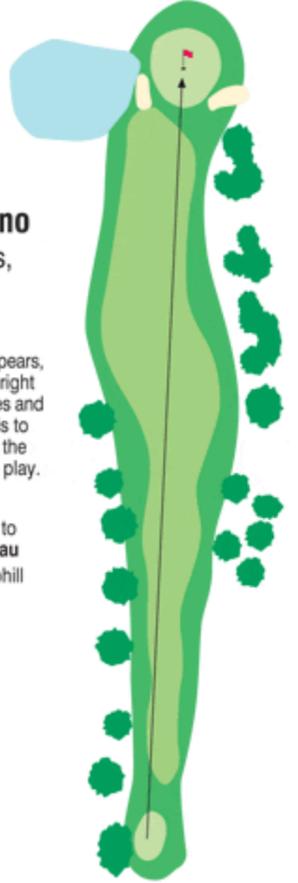
4 Riverbend Golf Club, Madera County Hole No. 12, 159 yards, par 3



THE SKINNY:
Take a peek which way the flag is blowing on the elevated green, because you can't feel the wind from the tee. Short shots will find the gnarly grass bunkers. Distance control is crucial.

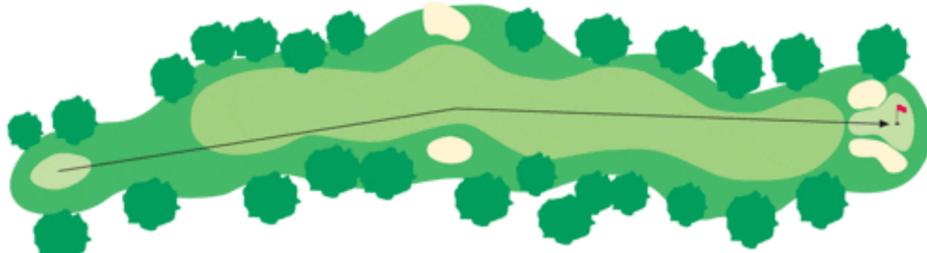
THEY SAID IT:
■ "You usually underclub. The breeze doesn't show [at the tee]."
– Hilary Ross
■ "If you find the bunkers, 3 is a good score." – Nate Skibo

7 Fort Washington Country Club, Fresno Hole No. 14, 426 yards, par 4



THE SKINNY:
This fairway is narrower than it appears, because trees hanging over the right side of the fairway can catch drives and block approach shots. Best bet is to stay left off the tee, but that puts the pond to the left of the green into play.

THEY SAID IT:
■ "This is a tough hole if you hit to the right." – Bryson DeChambeau
■ "Play one club more to this uphill green." – Vicki Mathiesen



5 Madera Golf & Country Club, Madera Hole No. 2, 460 yards, par 4

THE SKINNY:
Long par 4 over a fairway that rises slightly, then drops. Long hitters could have a downhill lie for a mid-iron approach to this small green. Shorter hitters will have an uphill lie, but will need a fairway wood to reach the green. Miss the green right or left and you're in a bunker – and the left bunker is really deep.

THEY SAID IT:
■ "The bunkers aren't fun." – Seth DePiano, after finding two sand traps
■ "One of the harder par 4s in the Valley. It's a small target to be hitting from 180 yards." – Nate Skibo

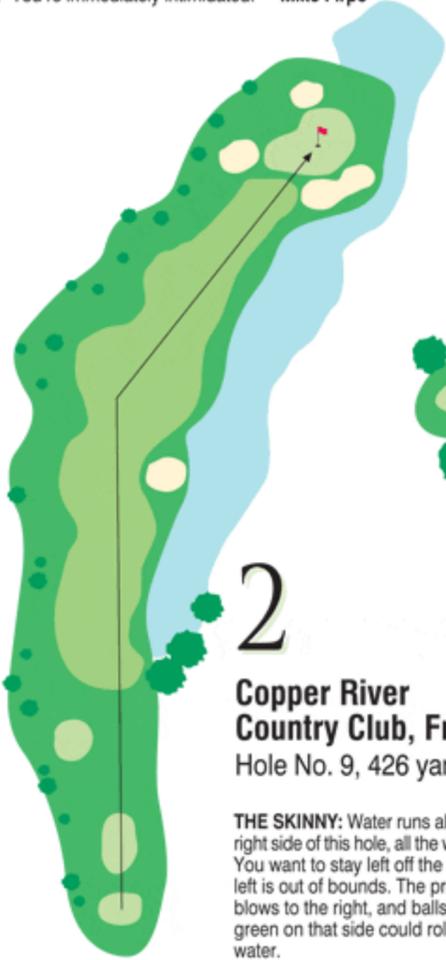
8 Fig Garden Golf Club, Fresno Hole No. 7, 214 yards, par 3



THE SKINNY:
Long par 3 with a creek running in front. Distance control is crucial to this shallow green – a short shot lands in the creek, a long one goes into bunkers or forces a tough downhill chip.

THEY SAID IT:
■ "Water [in front] makes you want to hit long, to use one club too many."
– Vicki Mathiesen
■ "This hole fits me well, I like its shape. But if you're over [the green], it's not a fun chip downhill." – Bryson DeChambeau

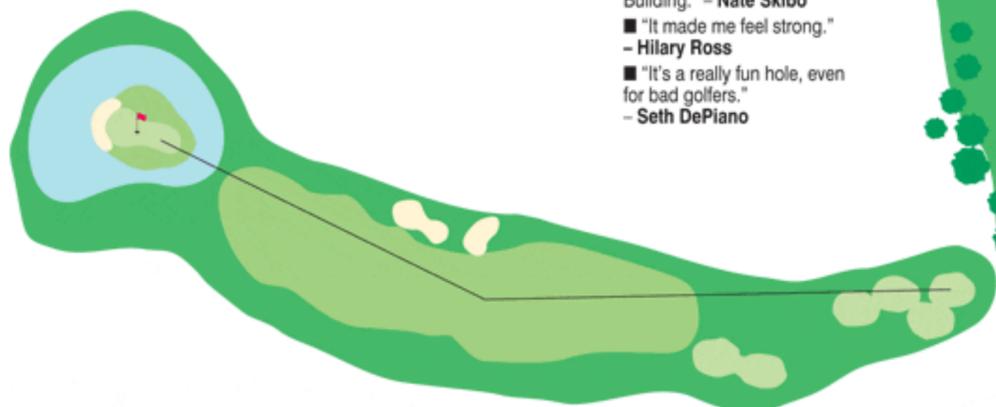
2 Copper River Country Club, Fresno Hole No. 9, 426 yards, par 4



THE SKINNY: Water runs along most of the right side of this hole, all the way to the green. You want to stay left off the tee, but too far left is out of bounds. The prevailing breeze blows to the right, and balls that miss the green on that side could roll down into the water.

THEY SAID IT:
■ "You have to hit an accurate tee shot to set up nicely for the approach."
– Hilary Ross
■ "If you hit a draw, this is a tough hole. And it's longer than it looks." – Nate Skibo

3 Pheasant Run Golf Club, Chowchilla Hole No. 18, 456 yards, par 5



THE SKINNY:
Island green is surrounded by water, so your approach shot is crucial. It's a par 5, so you can lay up, but many players still try to reach in two shots.

THEY SAID IT:
■ "Great last hole. Too bad we started the day with it." – Hilary Ross, who dunked her second shot from 150 yards
■ "Great risk/reward hole. You're tempted to go for it." – Nate Skibo

6 Brighton Crest Country Club, Friant Hole No. 13, 465 yards, par 4



THE SKINNY:
You're standing on the edge of a cliff, staring at the hills around Millerton. Your tee shot gets major hang time, making you feel like Long John Daly. One of the most popular holes at this foothill course.

THEY SAID IT:
■ "I felt like I was hitting off the top of the Empire State Building." – Nate Skibo
■ "It made me feel strong."
– Hilary Ross
■ "It's a really fun hole, even for bad golfers."
– Seth DePiano

9 Riverbend Golf Club, Madera County Hole No. 18, 455 yards, par 4



THE SKINNY:
Decision time: Pick your fairway. Right fairway is more direct but narrower. Left is wider, but doglegs. Just don't hit between them, where there is a large waste bunker. If you hit a fade, you won't like the black tees because trees block the left side of the driving lane.

THEY SAID IT:
■ "Toughest hole in the Valley from the black tees – it looks 10 yards wide." – Nate Skibo
■ "I love the choice it gives. If you go left, you can have an awkward angle to the green." – Hilary Ross