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Cottonwood Hills does its part to enhance city's golf reputation.

The Kansas prairie has spawned another golf course jewel.

Hutchinson's newest course, Cottonwood Hills Golf Club, is not yet on par with the city's world-renown Prairie Dunes, but the undulating Kansas prairie gives Cottonwood the look and feel of a top-flight venue.

And it helps, of course, that Cottonwood hooked its reputation to a big name in golf, Nick Faldo, whose company designed the Hutchinson course. Faldo gave the 18-hole course, north of Hutchinson, his blessing on Friday with a round of golf.

And he deemed it a "toughie."

Toughie, indeed. The U.S. Golf Association gives a golf course of standard playing difficulty a slope rating of 113. The Cottonwood course already has garnered a slope rating of 150.

Though the course sports a few damaged areas in the middle of some fairways - caused by recent heavy rains - Faldo declared the completed 18 holes "in fabulous condition."

The change from prairie land to golf course took some vision - and several years of masterful work. But Faldo saw the promise in what he described as a unique piece of land that has become the Cottonwood course and what developers hope will evolve further into a thriving community of homes surrounding the links.

Faldo surely saw the same beauty and challenges of the Kansas prairie as Perry Maxwell, who in 1937 whittled a 480-acre tract of land into the 18-hole masterpiece called Prairie Dunes. The Dunes in recent years has hosted two national championships, most recently the 2006 men's Senior Open.

Faldo likely envisions the similar renown for Cottonwood. That will take time, but for now it is difficult to ignore the sparkle of this community's newest crown jewel.

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