

**D**ear Hootie, I can't believe we won't be sharing these letters anymore since you stepped down as Augusta National chairman last summer. And the apparent sensibility of your successor begs the question: What am I, as a columnist, to do with a seemingly level-headed man like Billy Payne?

He won't lash out at "that woman," and I get the feeling he's going to leave the course alone, or as some insiders are quietly telling folks, he might even undo some of the changes made by you.

Hootie, let's be honest here; the course you were handed as chairman looks nothing like the one you left for Payne and the members to, uh, enjoy.

In that touching American corporate tradition of leaving problems for the next CEO to deal with, your seven-year tenure running the club and Masters passed with massive changes to the course, millions spent, and the result?

The result was a complete departure from Bobby Jones' original and inspired vision. Worse, it's no longer just a few of us fringe lunatics saying it.

Did you see what a six-time Masters winner and club member wrote in *Golf Digest* last month?

"Is it the golf course with the design principles that Bobby Jones and Alister Mackenzie intended?" Jack Nicklaus asks himself in front of 1.5 million readers. "Absolutely not. Augusta was generous off the tee, which made it great for everyday member play," Nicklaus continues. "But to score — to really play golf — you had to position the drive to get a good angle at the green. It was a second-shot golf course.

"Now the tee shot is more restricted. Trees and new bunkering have narrowed the landing areas, making Augusta a tight course with few angles or options," Nicklaus says. "I know the changes were made to provide an increased challenge for modern pros and keep them from overpowering the course, but it has taken the charm out of the Jones/Mackenzie design."

Oh Hootie, we all know you were doing your best. It's just that, well, your best will not be viewed kindly by history.

After all, the Augusta design changes ushered in a dreadful era that saw many Mona Lisa's disfigured so the United States Golf Association

## From The Golden Age, With Love

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



HISTORY MIGHT  
RIDICULE HOOTIE  
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HE ADDRESSED  
THE BALL

could pretend that distance wasn't making a mess of the playing values that were largely protected for, oh, about 200 years.

Time has a funny way of revealing lesser moments in the game's history. That mysterious fascination with turn-of-the-century geometric designs was forgotten when the Tillinghasts and MacKenzies came along in the 1920s. Today's "minimalist" movement has made the Robert Trent Jones legacy of clover-leaf bunkers and tough-but-fair layouts look tired to all but the real-estate developers who milked the "signature" design concept.

We're not even removed yet from this era of change-the-course-to-protect-the-ball-manufacturer's-bottom-line, and already memories are souring.

But here's the good news, Hootie.

You were on the record as saying you didn't like doing this and you wished someone would do something about the ball. You're free and clear.

Hopefully, Billy Payne can tidy up some of the mundane course design modifications that you and Tom Fazio made. Why, we might even start to look back fondly on these years of a Masters chairman speaking his mind.

But we can never forgive you for those trees down the right of 11 and 15, or for the letters to the past champions, or for giving Martha the time of day, or for ... well anyway, some of us will always remember that you were never shy in pointing out why you were making changes to Bobby Jones' vision. You weren't doing it to leave your mark, but because you thought it was the best way to deal with a problem that the governing bodies refused to solve.

Yours in doing something about the ball,

**Geoff**

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