

Augusta will bring more converts: and more questions

Writing this on a grey wet afternoon in March, I take some comfort in the knowledge that when you read this in early April, swamped in claim and counterclaim from Messrs Major, Kinnock and Ashdown, I shall be taking my annual holiday pilgrimage to Augusta and The Masters. Yes, I can almost hear you saying 'what a tough old life he has'; as you reach for the TV remote control and switch from tiresome action at Big Ben House to the sweet and fluid swing of gentle Ben – action of a decidedly better nature.

The TV cameras will of course be bringing the world's most photographed, feted, televised and talked about golf course smack bang into your sitting room; and whilst it would be a relief to think that the millions of golfers around the country – your members included – will find politics more interesting than pars and putts, the chances are distinctly unlikely. Television will bring still more new converts to the game, will make countless others want to rush off to the first tee at dawn the following day and, if I am any judge of behavioural patterns, will bring about the first rash of ill-considered demands for super-fast greens and highly manicured fairways and tees. "Why can't we have *our* course like Augusta", they will intolerantly howl in unison. "Why doesn't *our* greenkeeper produce putting surfaces like that, why can't we have *our* greens that colour?" The bleating will continue, *ad nauseam*, well into the summer!

As an on-the-spot observer I am not mesmerised by Augusta's spring gown, no matter how low it may be cut. For I know full well that Augusta's swanky style is the result of 51 weeks of preparation in order to bring one week of perfectly manicured perfection. Though greenkeepers will be aware of the sacrifices that must be made, few golfing punters will be even remotely aware – or care – that Augusta's picture postcard good looks are the result of huge budgets, state-of-the-art equipment, large maintenance crews and a positive army of volunteers who help to bring the seven day bonanza to fruition.

Furthermore, you may depend on the TV commentators to bring the most infinitesimal changes in the swing pattern of Joe Blow to your attention whilst totally ignoring to mention the span of time necessary to bring Augusta – or any other championship course for that matter – to peak perfection. Those manicured fairways don't just happen, as all turf professionals know. They are the result of months of planning, brought to a peak at just the right time.

Will our British commentators mention the difference in Georgia's balmy climate with that of, say, northern Britain, where greenkeepers will just be emerging from a spell of near zero growth that has lasted for all of six months? I'll bet a dozen Titleists that our differences don't even get a mention!

So, as the intolerance begins, tell your members they can have the perfection they seek – within the limitations of our climate – at a price. For a start, tell them that the course will



need a budget perhaps ten times its present one, probably with ten times the labour force and with a whole heap of tolerance and understanding, especially over the time span necessary for eliminating the undesirable before the quality can come good. Tell them those imperfections that suddenly seem so magnified are mostly of their own making and that you know how to bring back the quality fescues and bents – but tell them the truth: that perfection isn't cheap, it isn't quick and it isn't easy. Without a very understanding membership and a dedicated turf manager, it probably isn't there!

When the magnolias bloom at Augusta, golf course managers the world over can expect unrealistic demands to erupt from their members

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