

There is a lot to be said about Augusta National's recent transmogrification. (Transmogrify: fancy word meaning "to change into a different shape or form, especially one that is fantastic or bizarre.")

Some claim that narrowed fairways, the "second-cut," lengthened holes, bunker re-arrangement and swarms of new pines reflect exactly what Bobby Jones would have cooked up if he were here today.

Thankfully, Mr. Jones wrote and spoke as eloquently as anyone in the history of the game. Below are samplings of his thoughts [with some comments and thoughts by me in brackets]:

"Too often the worth of a layout is measured by how successfully it has withstood the efforts of professionals to better its par or to lower its record." [Hootie Johnson says that massive changes were in the works long before Tiger's 18-under-par performance. Sure.]

"I don't see any need for a tree on a golf course." [Mr. Jones made this comment to Alistair Cooke while sitting on his porch overlooking the 10th tee. I wonder what he'd think of the pine cluster on 15 or those gangly trees used to plug gaps so that we don't have to see anymore of those heroic recovery shots.]

"However much we may enjoy whaling the life out of the little white ball, we soon grow tired of playing a golf course that does not give us problems in strategy as well as skill." [Strategy to Jones was not employing rough to force a player to tee off with a two-iron instead of a driver. Nor was strategy telling the player where you want him to drive it and forcing him to play from the tournament committee's angle of choice.]

"The perfect design should place a premium upon sound judgment as well as accurate striking by rewarding the correct placing of each shot." ["Correct placing" is quite different from the current "premium on accuracy" mantra. Jones was thinking of accuracy inspired by strategic thinking and execution. Hootie Johnson's premium is on straightness off the tee. That's tightrope golf. Boring!]

What Jones Said, What I Think

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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"I believe it is true that with modern equipment and modern players, we cannot make a golf course more difficult or more testing for the expert simply by adding length. The players of today are about as accurate with medium or long irons as with their pitching clubs. The only way to stir them up is by the introduction of subtleties around the greens." [No comment.]

"We are quite willing to have low scores made during the tournament. It is not our intention to rig the golf course so as to make it tricky. It is our feeling that there is something wrong with a golf course which will not yield a score in the 60s to a player who has played well enough to deserve it." [Good luck breaking 70 on a firm, dry Sunday. They couldn't do it last year when the ground was soft.]

"The finishes of the Masters Tournament have almost always been dramatic and exciting. It is my conviction that this has been the case because of the make-or-break quality of the second nine. This nine, with its abundant water hazards, each creating a perilous situation, can provide excruciating torture for the front runner trying to hang on. Yet it can yield a very low score to the player making a closing rush." [Not anymore.]

"I should never care to argue for anything which would lessen the difficulty of the game, for its difficulty is its greatest charm. But when, in spite of vast improvement in the ball, in seeking to preserve the difficulty and to make scoring as hard as it was in the old days, we make the mistake of destroying the effect of skill and judgment in an important department, I cannot help protesting."

Let the protesting begin.

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