

Dear Hootie:

Boy, you pulled off a beauty last year. Giving those players a chance to go at those rewarding final-day hole locations. Silly you!

The old Sunday roars were back, and so was the Masters. Amen, brother.

Maybe you listened to those who said the Masters was becoming, well, dull?

Or maybe you just figured it out on your own. Yep, that's what it was. Martha distracted you. And when you actually turned your attention to watching golf, ol' Hootie was running for a cabin nap.

Since you're focused on golf again, I thought you might be open to some more ideas.

First, can we lose the tree-planting program? I know you wanted to narrow down the landing areas and plug every conceivable leak in the woods, but the new trees look — how do I say this nicely — extremely tacky.

You see, it's one thing to plant trees, another to plant them in dense swarms that make players bend over and chip out sideways. It doesn't look like Masters golf. No, the tree planting looks like the Bushwood Country Club memorial tree program gone awry.

While we're at it, Hootie, the "second cut" can go. This light rough stuff is not making the Masters better. The Tour's ShotLink stats are telling players that their birdie batting average goes up the longer they drive it, no matter what the lies look like.

Besides, the rough keeps a lot of balls from rolling into the trees. And we know you'd rather see a few more deserving shots reach the trouble, right?

The final thought is a big one. But I know you've considered a "Masters ball," and you were just waiting to read in *Golfdom* how to pull it off.

You see, most everyone in golf believes something has to be done to keep courses like Augusta relevant, safe and interesting. But from your hard-working writers to your well-paid players to your TV executives, they're all scared to death of this Wally Uihlein dude.

He's CEO of Acushnet Golf and he makes a lot of money selling expensive Titleist golf balls.

Feel Free to Stop Progress, Hootie

GEOFF SHACKELFORD



YOU ARE THE ONE
PERSON POWERFUL
ENOUGH TO
INTRODUCE A BALL
THAT RESTORES
SHOTMAKING AND
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Mr. Wally advertises a lot and overpays players and certain announcers to drink a special Kool-Aid recipe that has them publicly reinforcing the "you can't stop progress" mantra. So you hear the Kool-Aid drinkers publicly supporting this myth that people love golf because of the privilege of buying the latest \$58-a-dozen ball.

Privately, the Kool-Aid isn't working. Just about everyone is saying that a "tournament ball" is the only way to stop the distance madness causing assorted problems at courses around the world.

Knowing how much you care about the everyday game and how tired you are of changing Augusta National, people think you are the one person powerful enough to introduce a ball that restores shotmaking and rewards the genuinely long hitters.

You could present a free ball spec that the manufacturers would make just for Masters play. If the companies refuse, you could hire one company to make your ball and insist that the players use it. Your merchandise pavilion would sell a jillion sleeves of the Masters ball during tournament week, and I suspect plenty of classic courses would stock them, too.

And if players don't want to play by your rules? They are more than welcome to stay home.

If nothing else, a Masters ball would make driving down Washington Road safe from range balls. It would let you take down that awful green fence that we can see from the third tee. Sounds like a win-win to me!

Yours For A Masters Ball,
Geoff

Geoff Shackelford's *"The Future of Golf"* (Sasquatch Books, \$21.95) will be re-released this month with a foreword by Nick Faldo and new essays. He can be reached at geoff@geoffshackelford.com.