

Mum Is the Word

In the annals of eyebrow-raising Augusta National moments that make you go “hmmm,” I offer the following two anecdotes for no good reason other than it’s April and the just-completed Masters is still on our minds.

You probably know about the first item if you have an e-mail address and work in the golf industry. This involves the extensive series of Augusta National images taken Feb. 13, where the glorious home to golf’s first Major tournament is seen under a thick blanket of snow. The serene pictures looked like something kitchmeister Thomas Kinkade conjured up for a United States Golf Association Christmas card collection if Augusta National would allow such a thing. (Thankfully, even Augusta draws the line when it comes to good taste.)

An image of No. 12 was particularly striking because, for an instant, the sun slightly poked through. It’s quite possibly the most beautiful golf course image I’ve ever seen.

Also noticeable in the photographs was how little snow was on the green floors, thanks to the club’s subsurface heating system. If nothing else, the images made for the perfect “gone viral” SubAir Hydronics systems ad campaign.

I waited a few days to post the images on my Web site until a few other bloggers had posted them. I even cropped out the date in an attempt to protect the innocent on the off chance the club would be upset about the images. If club co-founder Clifford Roberts were alive, he’d likely launch an investigation into the heathen who exposed the beautiful Bobby Jones and

NATURALLY, AUGUSTA NATIONAL DENIES

THAT ANY CHANGES WERE MADE TO THE COURSE

FOR THE RECENTLY COMPLETED MASTERS

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



Alister MacKenzie design the world now knows is susceptible to low scores and . . . snow!

Sure enough, I was talking to a photographer from another major golf publication a few days later who said his magazine requested permission from the club to run the images. The club said “no” and also intimated it was looking for the source of the photos even though they were taken out of admiration for the beauty and sent harmlessly to friends who would appreciate them. Those friends just so happened to think *their* friends would feel the same way — and off to the viral races the images went.

It was yet another attempt by Augusta to control information. But as Tiger Woods will tell you, such efforts usually backfire in this day and age. Should it turn out the photographer lost his job, it’ll just reflect poorly on the club. After all, what is there to cover up?

Another Augusta surprise came when I was interviewing Ben Crenshaw about the design and its ties to the Old Course at St. Andrews. When I posed the question to Crenshaw that perhaps Augusta had lost much of its Old Course-inspired strategic charm thanks to the introduction of rough, he shocked me by saying he believed

the club had actually widened out many landing areas the past few years so some of the key angles of attack he so cherished were in play again.

Naturally, the club says no changes were made to the course for this year’s event. And we longtime Masters analysts know, the club will never acknowledge any undoing of former chairman Hootie Johnson’s wretched changes, even if they were made in a well-intentioned attempt to offset what is widely considered by most in golf to be the faulty golf ball regulatory work of the governing bodies.

An alleged fairway widening is exciting and just the kind of thing Masters fans *should* know about. It could also be a huge boon to golf course superintendents and green chairmen across the land looking for a positive example from Augusta National. But we’ll never get an official acknowledgment that such work took place to get the design back to its original intent.

Once again, an attempt to cover up a so-called alleged crime will be far more embarrassing than the so-called alleged crime itself. Especially since there’s nothing to be embarrassed about!

Visit *Shack, Golfdom’s* contributing editor, at www.geoffshackelford.com.