



# A DAY TO REMEMBER

By Pat Norton  
Nettle Creek CC

Way back on April 17 of this fine year, it was a distinct pleasure for me to be able to attend, for my first and probably only time, the Masters Tournament, courtesy of the Grass Roots and the WSGA!

I suppose, though I'm not really sure, that I was chosen at the last minute to attend because the spectator field was lacking its quota of tall, skinny, white 40-year old, Scots-Irish/American men...and needed to culturally balance the field by including at least one very unsophisticated 'dweeb'.

The other possibility is that the editor of this journal had been turned down by his 'top nine' choices for the Masters ticket..."sorry, Monroe...too busy"...sorry, Monroe...my Alaskan oil fields just came in strong"...or, "sorry, Monroe...I've got corporate board meetings all week long....maybe next time."

So 'ol Nort gets the last minute phone call..."Hey, Spud, nobody else can use this here Masters ticket...I might as well give it to you...there's only one available seat on the charter flight...which you'll have to vacate each and every time anybody wants to use the 'facilities'...sounds pretty good, eh?"

"Heck ya," says I. "Never gonna get another chance to Vijay Singh so up close and personal, and besides, I really, really want to see if there is another golf course out there better than my own little Nettle Creek CC. I've heard that Augusta National is kind of famous, is a great test of golf, has lightning fast greens, and is considered 'sacred ground'...all characteristics that accurately describe...my own little corner of the golf turfgrass world." "We'll see just what the commotion is all about every April," I mutter to myself.

My benefactor wisely counsels me beforehand to leave for 'Milorganite City, USA' plenty early the day before the charter flight so as to

avoid vehicle mechanical breakdowns, which would cause a serious emergency situation.

I decide that being a good father means attending my eldest sons' Boy Scout Court of Honor until almost 10 PM the night before, driving like a maniac to Milwaukee...with four cans of 'Diet Dew' in my system...arriving at approximately 12:30 AM.

My benefactor also counsels me to "get a motel room...you'll sleep great and be refreshed in the AM for the 6:00 departure."

I realize that I'm more the type who flies by the seat of his pants...I slept horribly, possibly because of the Diet Dew and certainly because I'm sleeping alone in some airport motel room instead of with my family. I felt really tired in the AM, and kind of wished that I'd driven the 130 miles from Morris to Milwaukee that morning. I also wished that I hadn't 'sowed down' so much caffeine laden soda, and decided also that arriving at the motel at midnight didn't make much sense, either!

My benefactor did not counsel me to wear my comfortable basketball shoes, 'Dockers' shorts, short sleeved sport shirt and sweater...all of which I left in my vehicle at the motel.

I opted instead for an ensemble that included my 'Topsider' deck shoes...the kind, as you all know, that have absolutely no arch or general foot support. I chose to wear no socks that day, which prompted the ladies in the First Aid station to let loose a few secretive giggles. It was so fortunate that the golf course that day was gentle, and rolling really...not at all what you'd expect if you ever listened to the other golf experts.

I also wore my customary black denim jeans, which to this day makes me shake my head. My wife Susan usually dresses me, but as already noted this was my first solo trip in many years.

Why would anyone wear black denim jeans on an 80°F day in Augusta, Georgia? Am I completely stupid, or what? I complemented my stunning outfit with a **long sleeve**, Oxford type GCSAA embroidered shirt...I wanted to be cool and imagined that more than a few people at the tournament would notice the logo and engage me in conversation about it...

My lovely wife and domestic benefactor wisely counseled me to shave clean those 'scuzzy whiskers'...growing a beard again that month for about the fourth time in '96/'97!! It's definitely my mid-life crisis identity thing...I'm getting a terribly bad receding hairline, but have discovered that I can grow a pretty decent beard to compensate for it...and does it look scholarly, or what?

I coolly decline to shave...wanting that Hollywood celebrity look. I

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The flight and bus ride to Augusta National are routine, but once we're departing the bus for the entrance gate the excitement starts to build for everybody. The pace mutually quickens, as if we're all afraid of missing something or somebody.

I must admit that I didn't try to shake his hand, although he passed within three feet of me climbing the 18th fairway. I am not much on shak-

I also got a good look at Nicklaus and Norman in their pairing...Jack didn't look too good in double bogeying the ninth, but he's had his competitive day. He's the greatest golfer of all time, I think. All of this "Tiger talk"

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makes me think that the accomplishments of Nicklaus and Palmer are being grossly overlooked. These guys were golf's legends, and couldn't achieve the Grand Slam! Tiger wins the Masters, and everybody thinks he's never going to lose!!

After bloating myself with golf merchandise at mid-day...that stuff was flying off the racks all day long, I decided to catch the leading groups on the tenth hole. Without a doubt, the tenth is the best hole on the golf course. The tee is up so high, with the fairway falling away down the hill seemingly forever... heck, it's got the descent of a pretty decent ski slope! Towering pines surround both sides of the fairway as you proceed down the fairway, down to the green. It's definitely the feeling of entering another part of this golf dreamworld.

On this hole I'm watching Montgomerie and Couples, who both ask me for advice on how to approach the green. I tell them both to just calm down, hit the shot, and can their putts for birdie. Actually though, they both look like they're

throwing long range darts at a beautiful green dartboard. The greens are such that if you miss the dartboard, especially the No. 10 dartboard, there'll be some severe penalties!

I proceed with them through the 11th green, where I find a seat in the bleachers behind the 12th tee. From here you can see 11 green, all of the par 3 12th hole, and the thirteenth tee. This is a pretty cool stretch of golf holes, and a great place to finish off a memorable day.

I decide to walk the thirteenth hole, which is where I began this incredible foot journey around Augusta National. I spend the last hour of our allotted time watching the contenders pass through no. 13 green and 14 tee. Tiger Woods cans a twenty five footer for eagle at thirteen, and the crowd goes wild! Tiger Woods just absolutely rips a drive at 14, while Paul Azinger looks 'week-endish' by comparison in following him at the tee.

The bus ride and air charter flight are routine on the way back to Milwaukee, but then the fun really starts as the pilot tells us that it's snowing down below...on April

17th!! And it's snowing and blowing really strongly...sort of like blizzard conditions!

I proceed home southward down I-94 towards Illinois thinking how ironic it is that so much can change and happen in one day. Beautiful fantasy-world golf course all day long, followed by the nightmarish, otherworldly feel of driving home three hours through a blizzard. Calm, peaceful, and relaxing Augusta National...then the scared feeling of either sliding off the road, getting clipped by a truck, or sliding off a highway bank because some idiot can't see the wisdom of driving slowly through terrible, snowy, windy conditions.

I plop into bed at about 1AM, the entire family having been there for hours. I am exhausted, but really feeling good. I saw one of the shrines of golf...a distinctly American shrine of golf. I felt the history and tradition of the place...which is the same feeling I get when I'm on most any golf course.

At Augusta National, though, that feeling is intensified about a hundred times. It's an awesome place, and it was an awesome day. ♣



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