

# Mum's The Word

By Jeff Gregos, Department of Plant Pathology, University of Wisconsin-Madison

On April 7th, I had the opportunity to spend a day at the Masters at Augusta National Golf Club. It was both a rewarding and educational experience that I feel everyone should take advantage of, if given the chance. As you know, the Masters is the most prestigious golf tournament on the tour. What you do not see from watching CBS is the extent to which Augusta National is manicured. It is easily the most intensively managed golf course I have ever seen. Most of the articles written by previous attendees discuss the competitors and some of the obvious conditions of the course. I would like to take a new angle and fill you in on what goes on behind the scenes.

The Masters is the second of the majors that I have had an opportunity to attend. (Now to find a way to get to the British Open and the PGA Championship!) Since I have worked a major tournament (1994 US Open at Oakmont), I have always been interested in

what goes on behind the scenes. Knowing Dr. Joe Duich from my days at Penn State, and recently seeing him at a meeting, I arranged a tour of the maintenance facility.

Upon finding Dr. Duich at the well-disguised maintenance facility, one of the first questions I asked him was what the greens were rolling. His answer set the stage for the rest of the day. His response was that "I should know what they were by just looking at them." If you watched any of the tournament, you saw that there was not much of a backswing for any of the players—even for the 30- and 40-footers. After meeting with him I paid more attention to the greens and saw that they were on the hungry side and didn't need all the speed considering the many undulations.

Dr. Duich did provide some interesting information about the tournament. For example, during the tournament the course has a crew of around 120 members. Of the 120 people, 46 are full-time crew members and the rest are volunteers. He also informed me of some of the liability issues with a tournament, especially with weather related issues. This was the first year that Augusta hired a bonded weather service. This relieves the Club of that liability in the case of an accident involving weather-related issues. Some of the weather forecasting equipment included the usual weather station and some experimental equipment that can determine if conditions are conducive for lightning. There were three satellite dishes on top of the main office building as well as several standards with lightning detection and forecasting instruments.

After meeting with Dr. Duich, I took some time to browse around the maintenance facility. I have seen many maintenance buildings in my travels, but none are as impressive as Augusta National's. The size of the facility was not all that impressive, but what was in it was. Much of the equipment is on loan for the tournament, but even so there was a lot. I counted about 15 fairway units, 15 rough mowers, around 50 utility vehicles, and about 10 response vehicles. The response vehicles were modified Toro Workmans that had just about everything needed in case of a turf emergency. These vehicles were placed at strategic locations on the grounds and could respond to an emergency at a moment's notice.

Another interesting fact about the maintenance facility is the practice green. I found several of the crew members practicing their putting following their



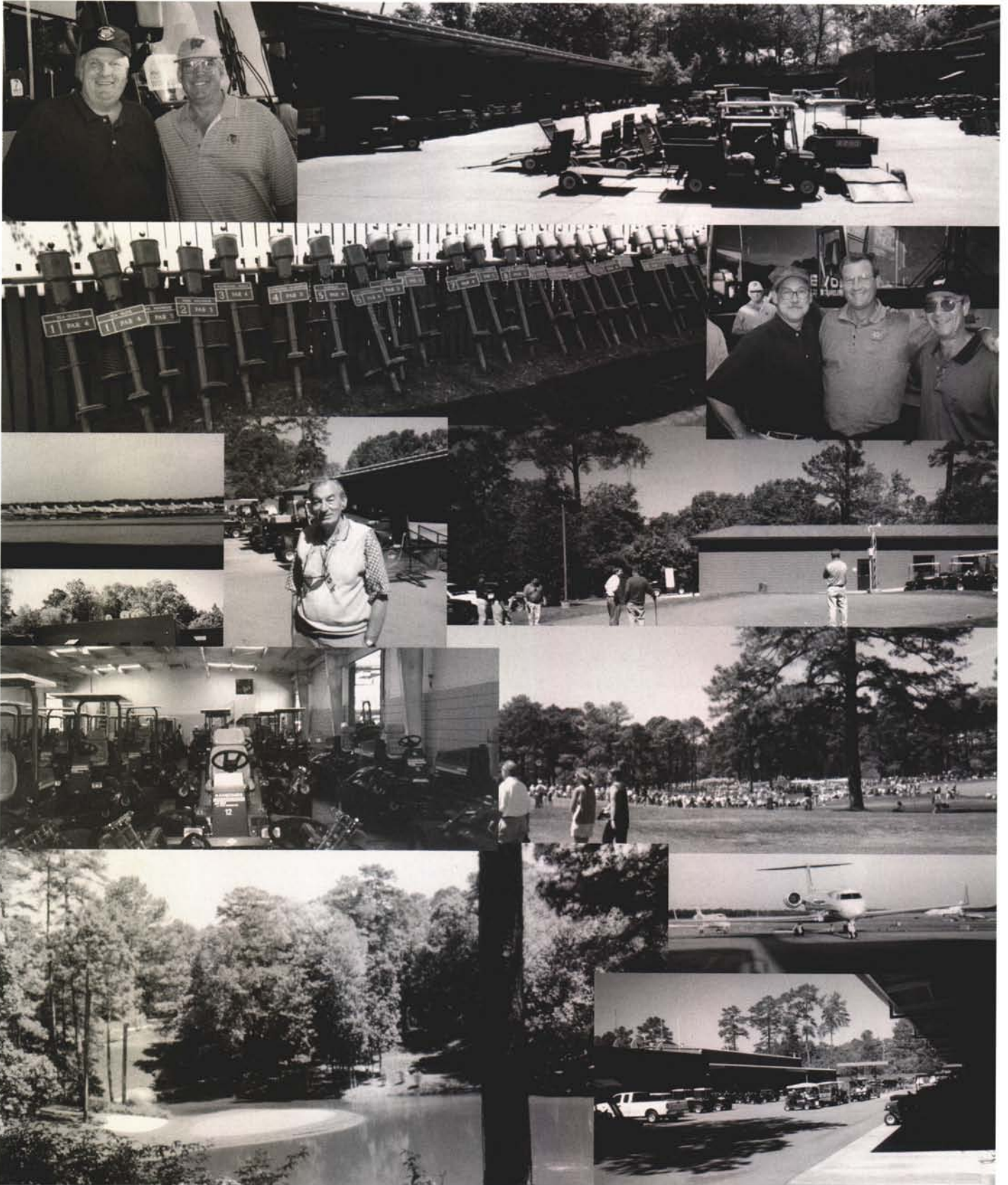
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morning jobs. I was informed what the variety was on this green. It happened to be A1—a hint of things to come at Augusta, maybe. From an unconfirmed source, I was told that a majority of the greens are still Penn Links, and about three of them are L-93. Try as I might I could not get anyone to talk about mowing height or mowing practices. That information could be a threat to National Security.

Following the last group of the day, I ran across Dr. Duich again. This time he was out stimping the greens in the afternoon. From the looks of how far the tape measure was out, I would venture to say that the greens were rolling around 13+, but that is just a guess. Tom Harrison informed me on the way back that, “the people who stimp greens at Augusta must swear on three Bibles that they will not reveal any readings.”

As you will see, many of my pictures were taken in the shop area, as cameras are not allowed on the golf course during the tournament. But I did manage a few interesting pictures of the gallery and the Par 3 Course. Little known, the Par 3 Course actually hosts the first tournament of the week. The competitors

play the Par 3 Course on Wednesday afternoon and they have a plaque to commemorate all of the previous winners. Also, no Par 3 winner has ever won the Masters.

After following Steve Stricker to the 16th hole, it was back to the airport for the return trip. The airport was interesting in the fact that it only had two gates and didn't even have a stairway for us when we landed. Yet, there were probably enough corporate jets to pay off the National debt.

I would also like to initiate a drive to help some of the golf community to better understand the research aspects of turf. One thing that I found interesting was that everyone that I talked with thought that the O. J. Noer Foundation and the O. J. Noer Facility were one in the same. This is far from the truth. So I open an invitation to anyone in the golf community to stop by the Noer Facility and learn a little about what we do here. I have already personally invited both Gene Haas and Thomas Schmidt of the WSGA.

As an endnote, I would like to thank Monroe Miller and the WSGA for the opportunity to attend the Granddaddy of Them All. ♣



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