



Thanks for the Memories!

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

Since I have never bought a lottery ticket (and have no plans to start), I will never win the lottery. Actually, I don't gamble (Ho Chunk, Las Vegas, etc.) either. So having my name drawn at the spring business meeting for the opportunity to attend the Masters Tournament was the ultimate jackpot for me. Winning was amplified by the sad reality that this may be the last year for the Wisconsin State Golf Association to hold its tickets for the Masters. Tourney officials want them back after all these decades. There is some behind-the-scenes work going on to return them, but it doesn't look good at this point.

The WGCSA charters a jet for the trip to Augusta and the plane has more seats than the WSGA has tickets to the Masters, so they very kindly sell six plane seats to the WGCSA and six to the WPGA. We, in turn, distribute them through a drawing. Winners from the previous year cannot repeat, so the process is one that simply cannot be fairer. The key here is that the Masters Tournament honors the Class A cards of the GCSAA and the PGA, and give us complimentary passes. That, too, is very generous.

Airport and airline security required an unusually early start for the Masters trip on Friday, even for golf course superintendents. We arrived at the Midwest Express ticket counter at Mitchell Field in Milwaukee at 4:30 A.M. After processing and some waiting, the plane departed promptly at 6:00 A.M. CDT. The six WGCSA members were seated across the cabin - six seats over the wing exit. You couldn't find six guys for better company - Scott Schaller, Wayne Otto, Dan Shaw, Randy Dupont and Gene Van Liere. Bob Vavrek also attended, but on a "regular" ticket.

The trip down included an excellent breakfast meal and after ample time for visiting, we arrived in Augusta at 9:30 A.M. EDT. We were at the "will call" ticket window near the main entrance of the Augusta National Golf Club by 10:15 A.M.

The Masters tournament is famous for efficiency and organization, and we experienced that getting through the gate and onto the grounds. There were no hitches. We stayed together for about 50 yards; Otto had to peel off and use the latrine while the rest of us went into the pro shop to fill out our request lists from home. Scott had a great plan - make the purchases first and then to check the bags at the check station near the 5th green. The buses were parked in that vicinity. I lost track of them in the pro shop, presum-



The WGCSA Masters Tournament Class of 2003 — Miller, Schaller, Van Liere, Shaw, DuPont and Otto.



Dan Shaw and Dewey Laak, tired after a busy day at the Masters Golf Tournament.

ably because my shopping list was longer.

That's when the fun began for them. Since we were in attendance by virtue of our GCSAA membership cards, we weren't allowed to leave unless we didn't want to return. The guys arrived at the check stand only to find it full. So, after extended conversation with gate guards and assurances that they would be allowed back in, they left to stash their purchases in our charter bus. When they returned to the gate, they were denied entry! It was a close call, but finally a security person allowed them to return to the course. By the time I made it to the check stand, room was available. Scott aged a full year by the close call!

Play had been suspended Thursday because of four inches of rain. I haven't seen so much mud since my farm childhood. There was no relief from it anywhere. Playing conditions for players, if they kept the ball mostly down the middle, were excellent. But spectators were slipping in the ankle deep mud most of the day. I tried tip toeing carefully at first, but after ten feet it was clearly hopeless. So for the remainder of the day, like everyone else, I

tromped and sloshed through the mess, feeling sorry for the repair work that would have to be done. There still is probably aerifying and overseeding going on at the Augusta National Golf Club.

The rain not only brought on the mud, it also knocked many blossoms from the flowering plants that are everywhere on the golf course. The colorful scene was more subdued than expected. But the temperature was perfect for watching golf and for walking around the golf course. The sky cleared by noon and the contrast between the bright blue sky and the green grass could not have been more dramatic.

The course, designed by Bobby Jones and Allister MacKenzie, is on the site of a former nursery. They created some of the most beautiful golf holes in the world; Randy was overwhelmed with the beauty of the 13th green site.

The greens seemed slower than in previous tournaments, or at least a lot slower than expected. A golf course employee was asked what the green speed was and he replied, "tournament speed." He gave no number.

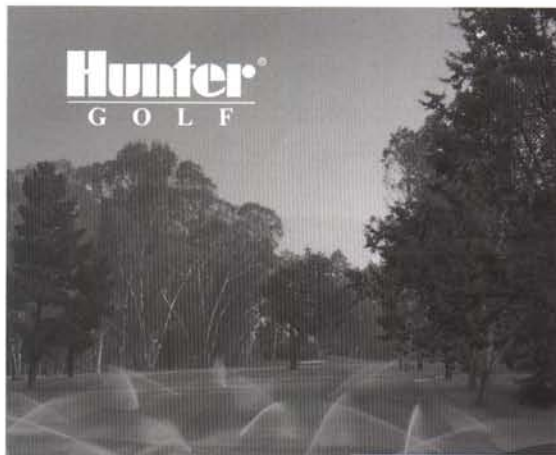
With as much rainfall as they received, a mowing must have been missed. Someone caught a scene with a large group dew whipping clippings on fairways. The cut was

uneven and off in height, an indication of wet conditions and lots of grass. Interesting, Dan and Randy noticed a single unit significantly off in height, but only in one direction. It had been corrected for the return pass.

This was the first year Augusta offered an actual "rough." It didn't amount to much - something less than 1.5" I believe I read - and when measured against the incredible mud right up to the rope lines, it could not possibly have affected scoring or decision-making. By the way, it was so bad that one ball pushed into the mud was actually judged to be in casual water!

One notable change from a previous trip to Augusta was the decreased emphasis on visual mowing. For example, a few years ago the approaches were cut with walkers and the stripes burned in. Not this year.

The Thursday rainout required a planned 36 holes on Friday. As it turned out, they played 27, but still the result was some greens work after 18 holes had been played. I watched from the bleachers at the 11th green/12th tee location. A raft of green coats tape measured the new hole location, measured the green speed and carried on some extended discussions. Golf course staff rolled the green with a double roller push implement, likely to roll down the spike marks. Another man cut the hole, taking



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only one plug. The loud whine of backpack blowers was there as the area was tidied up. Bunkers were hand raked with spring-toothed leaf rakes. It was pretty basic stuff.

Two other maintenance operations were obvious. Overloaded Toro Workman vehicles hauled sand about, here and there, and spread it where the mud was the worst. It didn't do much good. There were quite a number of strategically parked Workmans, loaded with a variety of equipment and tools. There were labeled "emergency" or some such phrase. The size of the course and distance from the shop must have required them.

The extra play on Friday gave us the rare and wonderful chance to see nearly every group play. I watched my favorites - Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player. Behind the 15th tee I stood at the rope and could have shaken hands with Tiger Woods as he waited out the group ahead of him. I saw Ben Crenshaw hit a couple of poor shots and shake them off. Nick Price hit a couple of dogs and nearly exploded.

Arnie Palmer is 73 and was talked into returning to the Masters this year. It is a tough course to walk - long and up-and-down hill - but he slugged it out and did not record the worst score for the day. By the way, some media idiot asked if he'd post his score. "If I play, of course

I post my score," he replied. As he walked down the 2nd fairway, Randy gave him thumbs up. "We've got to get it going pretty soon, boys," Arnie said good-naturedly. No wonder so many people love the guy.


Someone said they saw Jim Reinhart (USGA committee person and Augusta member) helping at one of the greens. He, of course, was a speaker at the spring business meeting where our names were drawn for the Masters trip. I did see him on TV on Sunday congratulate the winner after the playoff hole. Jim is a member of Milwaukee Country Club.

By the time 5:00 P.M. rolled around, WSGA members started to wander back to the buses. Refreshments were waiting for us. They tasted good and went perfectly with the conversation among the happy but tired Wisconsin golf fans.

The trip back was slowed by the tougher federal rules at airports these days, but we still made it back to Milwaukee by about 9:30 P.M.

All in all, this was a memory-making trip. For many among us it may be the last time we go to the Masters, if August GC follows through and calls the tickets back.

Let's pray for a miracle. ♣




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