



Within the Leather

by David Kazmierczak, CGCS

The Masters- is there any better way if you are connected to golf to bring the sport to the forefront

and get the collective juices of the golfing world flowing than Augusta National? The answer simply is- no!

I just got done watching Bubba Watson climb up the charts of golf's list of immortality with his less than exciting second jacket. I always love watching the Masters, and have since I was a very small child. My family has always been into golf so it was a big deal in my house even though I am a first generation superintendent.

I have to confess I have never been to the Masters. I plan to some day; was even flirting with the idea for a short time this year, but it just wasn't going to work out. Even so, I can picture every hole in my mind, recite half the names of the holes and if you took me there blindfolded I swear I could navigate the thing pretty well, as much as I have soaked in from the television through the years. But I love watching any major, because I am a golf rube.

I had two interesting conversations with two very different people about the Masters this weekend

I thought was interesting. One on Masters Saturday and one today while watching.

The conversation on Saturday was with a friend who is not a very avid golfer. In a room of four guys I was the only one who had not been there in person and he said something to the effect that I would be the last guy in the room he figured would not have attended. He then went on to say that the only VCR tape he has left is from the 1986 Masters that still brings tears to his eyes because of the relationship he had with his father and the relationship of Jack Nicklaus and his son who was caddying for him that glorious day when Nicklaus won his sixth.

Here is a guy who might pick up a club once or twice a year but is hooked by the game, this tournament, and all that it stands for. He gets it- he understands what golf is about and what joy it can bring. So why doesn't he play more?

The second person who I had a conversation with was my lovely bride, Denise. Now my wife has been with me on this superintendent journey for just about as long as she has known me. She understands golf courses. She has been on golf courses, specifically the ones I have worked at, more times than she probably would care to remember. She is not an avid golfer. I believe the

phrase “you know, if I never play this game ever again it would be fine with me” has been uttered more than a dozen times by her over the years, usually after hitting the 12th or 13th shot about 50 feet down a seemingly endless par-5.

She also is not a sports fan. Not really at all. She plays along, but the aforementioned statement about never again would be fine would probably apply to anything I would happen to want to watch on TV.

However today, as she happened by the big screen HD telecast, she set down next to me to watch the happenings at Augusta for a moment. She broke the silence as the leaders were coming off number 12 and then proceeded up 13 to the green surrounded by bunkers and Azalea bushes in full regalia.

“That is amazing, it’s like a painting,” she said.

I instantly laughed and kind of dismissed her comment with well, of course, it’s the Masters! I then proceeded to tell her the nuances of turf management for this event from the grass to the ensuring of Azaleas blooming and blah, blah, blah. Later, however I reflected on that moment.

What she witnessed at the Masters really was art, and her eye saw that art on full display. What she saw was beauty. Not just the flowers, but the whole thing. She was captured by that Augusta moment.

We all need to capitalize on that Augusta moment. It’s real, it’s tangible,

and with golf courses closing faster than they are opening everybody associated with golf had better think about ways to capture people like this who don’t really play much but can see and understand all the wonderful things that the game offers from beauty, to challenge, to a peaceful fun time or whatever. Golf can mean anything to anyone, it is up to all of us in the golf industry to help it along.

I think it is safe to say that we have all heard of the “Augusta Syndrome,” the idea that the Masters sets unrealistic expectations that normal operations just can’t hold a candle to. I am sure in some places that can be true. I submit that the “Augusta Syndrome” can be used to our advantage. There is no greater exposure to the game than the Masters. There is no greater representative of all the beauty that a golf course can be. There is no better time to capture the imagination of closet golfers like the two people I mentioned and try to get them hooked on the game. I plan on badgering my wife to play more. That will be easy. I will also try to get the friend out at least two, maybe three times this year with me in hopes it will light that spark. That may be a little harder but I’m going to try.

Embrace the Masters, don’t run from it. It truly is good for all that is golf.