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Impressions of Augusta National

By Chris Avers

Many of us sat glued to our television sets during the weekend telecasts of the recent Masters Golf Tournament, enjoying an annual tradition, taking in the beauty of the course, or rooting for a specific competitor. These are the reasons I usually watch the tournament, but this year I had added incentive. I was fortunate enough to visit the Augusta National Golf Club for the Monday-Tuesday practice rounds. I said fortunate because I was able to clear my calendar, had a place to stay, and did not have to worry about getting tickets. Augusta National is everything you hear and read about. I would like to share with you my impressions of one of the most beautiful golf courses in the world.

The immediate vicinity and the unkept bamboo / privet hedge surrounding the famed Augusta National Golf Club leaves the novice into thinking a terrible mistake has been made, but once you see the inauspicious main entrance and Magnolia Lane, you know that you are indeed in for a treat. Walking into Augusta, you leave the real world behind and enter into a make believe world where there is a golf course that is beyond description. If there is a more pristine or manicured golf course in the world, I would like to see it. The first thing that struck me was the grass, oh the grass! It was so green, so consistent, so short, and so fast! I was shocked at the lack of rough and lack of definition between playing surfaces. The fairways were mowed from treeline to treeline, there was no rough to speak of. Even the turf around fairway bunkers and the greens was fairway height. I could easily imagine putting on the fairways at Augusta.

I quickly realized that this golf course was a position course. You had to be in the correct position throughout the course in order to take advantage of monstrous rolls, approach angles to greens, and to be in position to go for the par 5's in two. The height of the turf and the undulating terrain meant a properly positioned tee shot would often result in a "short iron" to the green. The greens were severely sloped, multi-tiered, and as you could imagine, fast and hard. I also noticed that there were not as many bunkers as you might think from watching the event on television, but each and every one of the 45 bunkers comes into play. Watching some of the world's top professional golfers putting the ball off the green or leaving balls in the bunkers was comforting to witness.

In order for the course to look and play as it did, the maintenance operation was something I really wanted to see firsthand. I was impressed by the size, organization, up to date technologies (weather radar), and of course, the amount of equipment. Augusta's superintendent, Marsh Benson, and his large staff did a fabulous job of preparing the course for the tournament. Their attention to detail scares me personally. Along with the golf course; the practice facilities, the par 3 course, and the famous cabins are maintained with the same attention to detail that the golf course receives. I witnessed the lawn areas surrounding the "cabins" having "hotspots" hand-watered.

I was amazed at the level of organization for the entire event. All the bases were covered, down to the smallest detail. There was an army of teenagers, dressed in yellow coveralls, responsible for picking up trash and cigarette butts. All the food lines moved swiftly due to abundant amounts and efficient help. There was a wide selection of merchandise and again, an abundant amount. Both food and merchandise prices were very reasonable, considering the uniqueness and popularity of the event. The tournament apparatus, whether snack stands, merchandise tents, outhouses, spectator bleachers, or television towers all seemed to be a part of the everyday operation of the course. There was nothing temporary at Augusta. It appeared as though a tournament was played there everyday.

I have been to Augusta once, and am by no means an expert, but I would like to

offer these suggestions. First, all class A superintendents who have an opportunity to visit Augusta should do so. Take advantage of the complimentary daily pass your classification entitles you to. Second, visit during the practice rounds because you will have a better opportunity to see the course in its entirety. The Masters no longer sells daily practice round tickets to the public, therefore, the practice rounds are less crowded than in years past. Please note, the practice rounds at the Masters are considerably more crowded than the average tournament stop. Lastly, walk the entire course early in the week. Take in the entire layout, the azaleas and dogwoods in full bloom, and get a feel for the terrain. You will better appreciate the Masters the next time you watch it on television. I did.

News & Notes of the Mid Atlantic

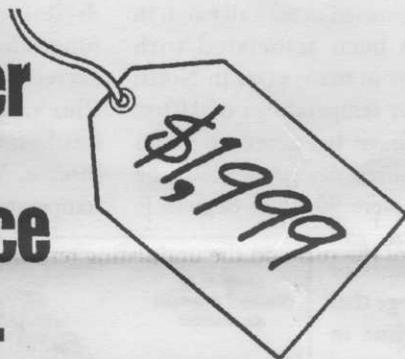
Congratulations to Kevin Pryseski, CGCS of Cattail Creek C.C. and Greg Rosenthal of Little Bennett Golf Course for being awarded a GCSAA Environmental Steward Award.

Belated congratulations to Pat Holt CGCS of Hunt Valley G.C., winner of the prestigious Leo Feser Editorial Award for his article, "Team-building Fosters Success", which appeared in the May issue of GCM.

Mark Stoddard, Superintendent at TPC Avenel, is looking for volunteers to work at this year's Kemper Open from June 5-11. If any superintendents have an assistant or valuable employee interested in helping out, please contact Mark at (301) 469-3728.

Both Bill Neus CGCS at Hobbits Glen G.C. and Ryland Chapman at Fairway Hills G.C. are working out of brand new maintenance facilities. - congratulations Bill.

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Reroutings

Michael Augustin, formerly at Indian Springs C.C. is the new assistant superintendent at Bethesda C.C.

Steven Nash CGCS, formerly at International Town & C.C. is now the manager, Grounds Services at Gallaudet University.

Mark Ross formerly at Chestnut Ridge C.C. is now working with Gary Harshman at Bay Hills G.C. as an assistant.

New Members

Please welcome the following members

Class B

Steve Keith Roberts - Marlboro Country Club
Thomas Tuttle - River Downs Golfers Club

Class D

Robert Mullings - Marlboro Country Club
Mostrom Tucker - Lakewood Country Club
Dino Psaroudis - Lakewood Country Club

Class F

Peter Li - Earth Resources Technology, Inc.
Walter Wiley - WaterWorld, Inc.
Donald Klein - Terra International
Chip Presendofer - Tee & Green Sod