

AZALEAS, MAGNOLIAS,  
DOGWOODS AND, THE GREEN JACKET:  
A LOOK AT THE HISTORY  
AND TRADITIONS  
OF THE MASTERS TOURNAMENT

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I am a golfer. Not a good golfer like our esteemed Judge White, mind you, but a golfer nonetheless. On second thought, maybe duffer would be the better term when describing my prowess on the golf course.

Be that as it may, I really don't think that one can participate in the sport without becoming somewhat interested in the history and tradition of golf. This is particularly true I think, during the second week of April when the eyes of the collective world turn toward a relatively small town in Georgia and for four days breathlessly await the award ceremony and the presentation of the green jacket to the new champion. Since we are exactly one week away from the start of this, one of the greatest spectacles in sports, I thought it might be of interest to the members of the society to look into the history and traditions of this golf tournament, and therefore, have entitled my paper "Azaleas, Dogwood, Magnolias, and the Green Jacket" a look at the history and tradition of the Masters Tournament.

In 1930, Robert Tyre Jones, Jr., in the eyes of the American public held a place of esteem second only to the immortal Babe Ruth. In fact, it might be said that "Bobby" Jones (all his life Bob Jones hated that diminutive nickname and his friends never used it) brought the game of golf to the attention of millions of persons who either had never heard of the game before or, having heard of it, dismissed it as an effete game for rich men's sons.

Jones had a remarkable career in golf even as a youngster. Even as a youngster of 14, he had qualified for the United States Open, the toughest tournament in United States golf. He had won everything there was to win in golf by late 1929, so that when he won all four of the important championships in 1930, the British Amateur, the British Open, the United States Open, and finally the United States Amateur, he had accomplished what came to be called "The Grand Slam of Golf". When he returned to America after winning the last British Championship, he was given a ticker-tape procession down New York City's Fifth Avenue -- the welcome of a returning war hero.

Bob Jones had done everything he had set his mind and body to do in the world of competitive golf, but he was tired from 14 years of the battle: tired of the sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach as he stepped onto the first tee of a championship course; tired of not eating because he could not eat during important matches; tired of the adulation of the crowds who would not allow him a private game of golf for his own pleasure.

So in 1930 Bob Jones announced that he would no longer engage in competitive golf, but would retire to his law practice and business at his home in Atlanta, Georgia. The public was amazed at his decision, but as time went on, it began to see how right the decision had been. So, Bob Jones did quit the competitive trail and played "friendly golf" with people whose company he enjoyed. He could not give instructions in golf,

something he had dared not do as an amateur. The finest instructional movies came from Warner Brothers Films as a result of Bob Jones' knowledge and love of the game. These films have now been converted to video and are available even to this day as some of the finest instructional motion pictures ever made in the history of golf. He looked into the problem of better club design.

Jones was sure that he could help design a better golf club and he did so collaborating with the A.C. Spalding Company, who in the 1930's sold millions of Bobby Jones' signature golf clubs to the golfers of America.

Finally it came time for another venture Bob Jones had had in mind for many years. He wanted to help design and build a golf course with all the delights and challenges, the pleasures and travails, of the many fine courses he had played in his long career. He would find a choice piece of rolling countryside in Atlanta or near to it, and there he would build a "golfer's Paradise" for himself and for his friends to enjoy. At last he would be able to play that private friendly game without the mob being on his heels beseeching him for autographs at each successive tee.

At this point in Bob Jones' life there occurred a most marvelous melding of his great talents and experience with those of a successful Wall Street banker named Clifford Roberts. The two men had met several years before at a golf tournament. Roberts occasionally visited in Augusta, Georgia. Bob Jones' wife had been born in Augusta. Cliff Roberts was aware of 365 acres of beautiful rolling Georgia pinelands that might fit into

Bob Jones' golf-course-building plans. The property had been in the hands of a famous horticulturist and nursery owner, a Belgian Baron named Prosper Jules Alphonse Berckmans.

The Berckmans family had moved to Augusta in 1857, after having left Europe for political reasons. P.J.A. Berckmans, Sr., was a scholar, a horticulturist, a landscape architect, a botanist, and a nursery man. In Augusta he established the foremost nursery in the United States of America. In recognition of his remarkable work in horticulture, Mr. Berckmans was honored by many societies in Europe and America. He originated and disseminated hundreds of species of flowers, shrubs, and trees. It is very probable that without his imagination and talent, the American South as we now know it would not have been so beautified with azaleas and camellias, with peach and jasmine trees.

It was to this magnificent spot that Robert T. Jones and Clifford Roberts came. Accompanying them was Alfred Bourne of the Singer Sewing Machine Company who had a winter home in Augusta. One may ask "Why in the world would you have a winter home in Augusta, Georgia?". The explanation is simple, Atlanta, Georgia is some 1050 feet above sea level, while Augusta some 150 miles to the southeast of Atlanta on the South Carolina border enjoys an elevation of only 162 feet above sea level. As a result, the winters are much less severe in Augusta than in Atlanta. Jones has recorded in the following words what he felt, as he turned off the highway and rode down the long archway of magnolias to the manor house:

"I stood at the top of the hill before that fine old house and looked at the wide stretch of land rolling down the slope before me. It was cleared land for the most part, and you could take in the whole vista all the way down to Rae's creek. I knew instantly it was the kind of terrain I had always hoped to find. I had been told, of course, about the marvelous trees and plants, but I was still unprepared for the great bonus of beauty Fruitlands offered. Frankly, I was overwhelmed by the exciting possibilities of a golf course set in the midst of such a nursery."

Next, the organization of the new golf club membership was established. I quote from Bob Jones the following:

"The Augusta National Golf Club itself was born of very modest aspirations to begin with. Clifford Roberts had been coming to Augusta for some years as a seasonably regular winter visitor.

Living in Atlanta only a short distance away, I had come to Augusta often over a period of years for friendly golf and an occasional charity match. I also played in the Southeastern Open Tournament over the country club and Forest Hills courses in Augusta during the early part of 1930. I had always been impressed by the fact that, especially during the winter season, golf courses around Augusta were considerably better conditioned than courses near Atlanta, and since at that time we were doomed to coarse Bermuda grass for putting greens in the summer, it was in winter golf that our best hope lay.

In any event, when Cliff came to Atlanta during the late fall of 1930 to suggest to me that I join him in organizing a club and building a golf course near Augusta, I found myself in a very receptive frame of mind.

The attractive aspects of the proposal were somewhat as follows: Augusta was well known to me as a resort area and a pleasant setting for golf during the winter months. Cliff and I had a number of friends among the permanent

and winter residents there who could be counted on to form a nucleus around which to build our club. I felt that the financing of such a project would be infinitely more likely to succeed in Augusta than in Atlanta.

Secondly, I was acutely aware of the fact that my native Southland, especially my own neighborhood, had very few, if any, golf courses of championship quality. The prospect of myself building a course according to the high standards of excellence I would set, based on what I considered to be a very wide experience in the game, was most intriguing. I truly regarded it as an opportunity to make a contribution to golf in my own section of the country, as well as to give expression to my own very definite ideas about golf-course design.

Thirdly, the piece of ground available, as described by Cliff and as later confirmed by me in a personal visit, seemed ideally suited to the purpose Cliff was suggesting. In brief, the dream was completely enthralling, especially at a time when I was, I suppose, flushed with success and already deeply involved in enough golfing projects to preclude, at least for many years, my taking any serious interest in other activities.

As the name implies, the new club was set up on a national basis. We planned to have only a small group of local members upon whom we could rely for help in the day-to-day administration of the club's affairs. Our aim was to develop a golf course and a retreat of such nature, and of such excellence, that men of some means and devoted to the game of golf might find the club worthwhile as an extra luxury where they might visit and play with kindred spirits from other parts of the nation."

Thus with this dream firmly implanted in the minds of both Bob Jones and Cliff Roberts, they approached the renowned golf course architect, Dr. Alister Mackenzie, to design what would later become Augusta National Golf Club. Their goal was that the course be built within the capacity of the average

golfer to enjoy. They realized that the members of the club that they envisioned would be a sophisticated group of golfers, but they would not stand for a golf course which kept them constantly straining for distance and playing out of sand.

Therefore, with Mackenzie as the architect and Bob Jones as his advisor and consultant, the pair found embodiment in the design of Augusta National Golf Club, Mackenzie's creed in designing golf courses: "the most enjoyment for the greatest number". I quote again from Bob Jones:

"As far as possible, there should be presented to each golfer an interesting problem which will test him without being so impossibly difficult that he will have little chance of success. There must be something to do, but that something must always be within the realm of reasonable accomplishment.

From the standpoint of the inexperienced player, there is nothing so disheartening as the appearance of a carry which is beyond his best effort and which offers no alternative route. In such a situation, there is nothing for the golfer to do, for he is given no opportunity to overcome his deficiency in length by either accuracy or judgment.

With respect to the employment of hazards off the tee and through the green, the doctor and I agreed that two things were essential. First, there must be a way for those unwilling to attempt the carry; and second, there must be a definite reward awaiting the man who makes it. Without the alternative route the situation is unfair. Without the reward it is meaningless."

With these ideas, the Augusta National Golf Club was opened in 1931. Obviously the United States and the World were in the throes of The Great Depression, and the early years of Augusta National were not easy from an operating standpoint.



Sometime during the second year of the existence of the golf course in its completed form, and from somewhere within the hard core of faithful who had accepted responsibility for the direction of the club, there came the suggestion that Augusta National try to get the U. S. Open Championship. There apparently were many conversations on that subject among the members of Augusta National and with the officials of the United States Golf Association.

Apparently the idea was regarded among both groups as not entirely without merit, but in the end, enough objections were found to cause both groups to agree that the project was not feasible, the most important opposing reason being that the championship would have to be played during the early spring instead of, during the month of June or the first portion of July, since play is not allowed on Augusta National during the summer months to protect the integrity of the course.

From these conversations concerning the U. S. Open spring forth the idea of the Augusta National Golf Club hosting their own spring tournament. It was envisioned by Jones, Roberts, and others at Augusta National to be based on a definite set of qualifications which a player must meet in order to be considered for an invitation. The first such tournament dubbed the First Annual Invitational Tournament was played in 1934. Even before that first tournament was played, Cliff Roberts had begun to think and talk of it as the Masters. When Roberts first

suggested it to Jones, he vetoed it on the basis that it was a title entirely too presumptuous for them to apply to a tournament of their creation.

Before too many years had passed, however, the term "Masters" genuinley could be applied to this tournament, and certainly some of the great masters of the golf game have been champions at Augusta.

Among those who are historians of the game, who can forget Gene Sarazens' double eagle on the par 5 15th in 1935 to tie Craig Wood and ultimately win a playoff and who can forget the names of golfing greats that have donned the green jacket symbolizing the Masters Champion: Jimmy Demaret, Byron Nelson, Ben Hogan, Sam Snead, Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Billy Casper, Tom Watson, Ben Crenshaw, Seve Ballastaros, and Nick Faldo.

But some of the more interesting stories in the history of this tournament lie not with the eventual champion but the "break-through to win or almost win".

A good example is the Masters Champion of 1948, Claude Harmon, who was a club professional, who the year previous had finished 20th in the United States Open and as a result, received a courtesy invitation to play along with the "names of golf" and wound up winning, or amateur, Billy Joe Patton, missing a playoff with Sam Snead and Ben Hogan by only one stroke in 1954, or Ken Venturi, then a 24 year old amateur in 1956 losing by one stroke

to the eventual winner, Jack Burke, Jr. Even the most casual of golf observers remember 1986, when Jack Nicklaus, at the age of 46, put a string of birdies together on the back nine of Augusta to win a 5th Green Jacket, and more recently, Larry Mize chipping in from 60 yards on the first playoff hole to defeat Seve Ballastaros and Greg Norman.

One of the other allures of this golf tournament stems from a policy initiated by Bobby Jones and Cliff Roberts and certainly perpetuated by Cliff Roberts until his death in 1977 and then carried forward by Hord Hardin since, is the almost total lack of commercialism which surrounds this tournament. This is particularly true in an era when we have such tournaments as the "AT&T Pebble Beach National ProAM" and the "Shearson Leamon Hutton Brothers Open" to name two on the PGA Tour. There are no programs printed, there is no public mention of the purse awarded to the players. Television announcers with CBS, who has held the contract to televise the Masters for a number of years are given a list of things which they may talk about on air and things which they may not talk about on the air by the Directors of Augusta National.

As a result of the leadership and foresight of Bob Jones, Cliff Roberts, and continued currently by Hord Hardin, the Masters Tournament has evolved to exemplify and promote the ideal as to how a golf tournament should be.

While some of you on Sunday afternoon next may be busily scurrying, trying to find receipts and cancelled checks for the Monday midnight I.R.S. deadline, I know what I will be doing. I

will be glued to the front of my television set watching and hearing Pat Summarall, Ken Venturi, and Ben Wright, described golf shot made amid the color of the azaleas and dogwood at Augusta National Golf Club. Finally late that afternoon, I will watch in awe as Nick Faldo, the 1990 Champion, either dons the green jacket for a third straight year or helps a new champion into the green jacket symbolizing the winner of the one and only Masters Tournament.