



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Masters Golf Tournament

Masters Golf Tournament

April 11-14, 2024

This week, the Masters Golf Tournament is being held in Augusta, Georgia. I had the good fortune to attend the 1984 and 1985 tournaments, courtesy of my nephew, Ronnie, who played and made the cut in both tourneys. In the 1984 contest, he tied for fifth place. That's big time, and our hometown of Lovington, New Mexico was justly proud.

I was flattered by being Ronnie's guest. Each player was given a limited number of tickets, so I considered myself one of his chosen few. Plus, I had started fiddling around with the game in order to join my brothers' playing. Ross and Tom were avid and talented golfers, and when I visited them, like it or not, I found myself on the links.

Tickets for the Masters were (and are) hard to come by. Thousands of fans participate in a lottery for a limited number of tickets. Many tickets are available, but not to the public. They are offered to club members and other people who have connections. This year, if a person is able to purchase a ticket for the four days, they go from \$8,749 to \$10,061. Factoring in travel and hotel expenses, the Masters experience is not for those with thin wallets.

A Masterful Landscape

So, what does all that money---or having a talented relative---lead to? A good walk, unspoiled. Unspoiled because spectators do not have to play this difficult layout. The Masters golf course is the most beautiful man-made real estate I have ever seen.

The left photo in Figure 1 depicts the layout of the course, but it does not capture the immaculate arrangement of the trees, bushes, and flowers---one could easily believe, down to the petals on the flowers.



The right photo is a picture of the most famous hole on the course, the 12th. It is situated in what is called Amen Corner.

Figure 1. The Masters golf course.

The cliché about golf being “a good walk spoiled” does not hold water when walking---or I suspect playing this course. Or for that matter, many golf courses. During my short time in playing the game, breaking 100 on rare occasions, I came to look forward to trying to gain a bogey here and there, but also to take in the vast greenery and flowers that had been planted for my pleasure.

My favorite sports, swimming and tennis, offer no similar pleasant diversions. I rationalize that my never learning to play the game of golf like my brothers was because I was too often diverted by “smelling the roses.” ...Pathetic, I know. Nothing more than an excuse for my pitiful golf game. And to set the record straight, I excelled in swimming because I put in thousands of hours of concentrated, dedicated time. I became an above average tennis player. Even though I started the game in my late 30s, I spent many hours of practice time, well into my 60s. Back to the Masters.

Irrelevant Reverence

As readers know from my frequent criticisms, I think many people become too infatuated with sports, both its events and its stars. While watching the Masters being introduced Friday on ESPN, the announcer was standing on an elevation with the 12th hole behind him (the right photo in Figure 1).

He said he was standing before a setting that was the most moving experience he had ever witnessed. He emphasized by restating: ever witnessed in his lifetime. He was in the middle of comparing Amen Corner to the Grand Canyon and other spectacular natural wonders. I did not hear the others. After he mentioned “Grand Canyon,” the TV audio was lost to my louder proclamation of “Bullshit!” The man’s perspective on life was a triple bogey

On Friday’s broadcast of the second round, Tiger Woods shots were showed---time after time. Risking being labeled as a sourpuss, Tiger barely made the cut to play on Saturday. I was more interested in how the leaders were faring against one another.

The issue is fame. Fame draws TV audiences. I did not see one shot of Ludvig Aberg, a newcomer and sure to be one of the world’s top golfers. Why not? He was in the top ten throughout the day and finished Friday in seventh place. Because, unlike Tiger, Aberg is not known to the public. His is not sufficiently famous to warrant showing his extraordinary skills.

A Modest Mindset

Having attended several PGA tournaments in the past, I had expected the Augusta golf course to have a large multi-storied clubhouse. It did not. As with its landscape, its buildings were pristine. Unlike its landscape, the buildings were modest. One could only be impressed by the Masters leaders who have kept this part of America away from massive, often overbearing buildings.



Figure 2. Understated elegance.

For example, Figure 2 shows the main entrance to the complex. Of course, many other buildings are located behind this small structure; golf equipment, cart ports, and players’ lounges to cite a few. As you can see, all is well-kept.

Ronnie took me inside the clubhouse for lunch. Again, no pretension. I could have been at a public golf course in New Mexico and not have noticed much difference. Of course, there were some differences. The food and service were sterling. So was the décor, simple (again) but with style.

My Cup Runneth Over

If you are watching the Masters this weekend, take a look at the audience around the fairways and greens. Without exception, they are not carrying around Starbucks coffee cups. The fastidious DNA of the Masters is on display once again: No foreign coffee cups are allowed in these “hollowed” grounds.

Furthermore, no Perrier or Evian water bottles are allowed. Even for the players. They drink water from bottles with the Masters logo on them.

On the first day of the 1984 tournament, Ronnie drove us (me and a privileged few of his relatives) to a reserved parking lot for the players. He let us out, while he departed to prepare (practice) for the upcoming round. We made our way to the entrance gate, where the following took place”¹

- Masters’ example of anal compulsives, “Sir, the 7/11 cup is not permitted.”
- I was confused. 7/11 was universal....at least in America...what was the story?
- “The cup is the problem? Okay, I’ll toss it.”
- “No need. Here. (as he gave me a cup with the Masters golf tournament logo on its side, as shown in Figure 3). Just pour your coffee into this cup, and toss the other one.”



I had mixed feelings about this encounter. I have a trait, long ingrained, to resent and act against most anything that impinges on my notion of free-choice and freedom. In later life, I have also come to respect, even cherish, norms being set that are not alterable, not subject to change in an ever-changing America, mostly toward coarseness.

Figure 3. Staying the Course.

For the Weekend

I am writing this report on early Saturday morning of April 13, 2024. I am not sure if I will post a postscript to the next two days. But I have been meaning to write to you about some of those past times about the Masters; times I treasure.

¹ I have paraphrased this conversation, as I did not make recordings of my various encounters during those days. Nonetheless, true to my hero, Mark Twain, these events represent my best recollections...with my dedication to being the hero in these reports.

I can still picture many of my walks over the Masters golf course. Of my following Ronnie, of his generosity for giving me tickets to witness the tournaments. Of his incredible putt on the 18th of the final round.

Golf can be a good walk spoiled. But that is determined by the person who walks a golf course. For me, golf was a good walk, unspoiled. And yes, I did smell a few flowers as I looked for my lost golf balls. But I am glad my present times are in the blue water swimming and not on the golf greens three-putting.

Nonetheless, I hope you play golf or watch it being played. It is a fine way to spend time, just don't forget to look at something other than your score card.