

Augusta National Golf Club Has Been Masterful at Growing the Game of Golf

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The promise of springtime is renewal. Migrating birds return; flowers rediscover their bloom; animals are reborn through their young. And hope regenerates in humans. This is more than tradition – it is life. Every culture in every corner of the world celebrates the return of spring and the new beginning it offers.

Within sports, a sure sign of spring is the Masters. Since 1934, it's been the first of the four major championships in men's professional golf. And as the only men's major played at the same course every year, the Masters is a constant in an ever-changing world. Just as the swallows return to Capistrano every March, the best male golfers in the world find their way to Augusta, Ga., every April.

That rite of spring at Augusta National Golf Club is made more memorable by the glorious stage presented by nature. Towering Georgia pines line the perfectly manicured fairways cutting across contoured hills whose mounding ranges from subtly devious to dramatic drop-offs. And it's all set against the brilliant bloom of azaleas, magnolias, dogwoods and wisteria. Color this spring in all its glory.

And few events serve up deserving winners as reliably as the Masters. The second year, in 1935, there was the albatross by Gene Sarazen. From 1949 through 1954, five of the six Masters were won by Sam Snead and Ben Hogan. And from 1958 through 1966, seven of the nine were won by Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus, with Gary Player tucking in the first of his three Masters wins during that run.

There was the precision of Tom Watson in 1977 and '81; the boldness of Seve Ballesteros in 1980 and '83; Ben Crenshaw's improbable win in 1995 days after serving as pallbearer for Harvey Penick, his longtime coach; Nick Faldo overcoming Greg Norman's six-stroke Sunday lead in 1996.

This year is the 25th anniversary of Tiger Woods winning by 12 strokes in 1997 at the age of 21, the first of his five Green Jackets. In 2004, Phil Mickelson finally won his first major and then took five more, including the addition of two more Green Jackets.

Woods' fifth Masters victory in 2019 capped an astounding comeback 11 years and nearly as many surgeries after his last major. And in 2021, Hideki Matsuyama became the first player from Japan to win a men's major.

But Augusta National is about more than simply great competition. Few events in sports so jealously guard its traditions as the Masters. The Green Jacket for the winner; the Champions Dinner; the Par-3 Contest; skipping balls across the pond at No. 16 in practice rounds; honorary starters; pimento cheese sandwiches; white jumpsuits for caddies; green chairs for Patrons and food prices that shame other sports events.

Over the last two decades another important tradition has emerged. With a series of bold moves, the Masters – which is the only men's major not run by a governing body but rather by ANGC – has taken a leadership role in growing the game of golf that's put it on a footing with the USGA, R&A and PGA of America, which is remarkable for a private club.

The list of initiatives supported by Augusta National – first under Chairman Billy Payne and now under Chairman Fred Ridley – are impressive. The club has worked with governing bodies abroad and corporate partners at home to grow the game while also growing its responsibility to the world outside of golf.

Since 2009, Augusta National has teamed with The R&A to stage the Asia-Pacific Amateur Championship, whose winner receives an invitation to the Masters and The Open. The 2010 and 2011 APAC winner was Matsuyama, who in the 2021 Masters proved that was not a fluke but rather a prelude to greatness.

The Drive, Chip & Putt for junior golfers ages 7 to 15 was first played in 2014 with qualifying sites around the country and the final at Augusta National. The event was created by ANGC along with the USGA and the PGA. That first year, Lucy Li won the Girls 10-11 division and later that year became the youngest

to ever qualify for the U.S. Women's Open at age 11. Now 19, she's a professional playing on the Epson Tour.

In 2015, Augusta National teamed with the USGA and The R&A to launch the Latin America Amateur Championship, the winner of which also gets an invitation to the Masters, The Open, the U.S. Amateur and The Amateur Championship. In 2018, Joaquin Niemann of Chile triumphed. He's currently No. 20 in the Official World Golf Ranking.

Augusta National broke a barrier by admitting former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and banker Darla Moore as its first female members in 2012. In 2019, it staged the first Augusta National Women's Amateur, a 54-hole tournament for the best female amateurs in the world with the final round played at Augusta National the Saturday before the Masters and the day before the Drive, Chip & Putt national finals.

The first Augusta National Women's Amateur featured a memorable final-nine flurry by Jennifer Kupcho, who played the last six holes five under par to defeat Maria Fassi by four strokes. Both are now playing on the LPGA Tour.

And while golf can't change the world, ANGC is proving that golfers can. In 2020, when the Masters was delayed from April to November by the Covid-19 pandemic, Chairman Ridley announced that Lee Elder – who in 1975 became the first Black to compete in the Masters – would join Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player as an honorary starter in 2021.

Ridley also revealed the creation of the Lee Elder Scholarships for Paine College, a Historically Black College in Augusta. Two scholarships are awarded annually, one each for the men's and women's golf team. Augusta National also partnered with Paine College in funding creation of a women's golf team at the school.

“We would like to thank our friends at Paine College, especially President Dr. Cheryl Evans Jones, who immediately embraced the idea of honoring Lee Elder,” Ridley said in November 2020. “Through this partnership, we look forward to further cultivating our relationship with Paine College, helping the school create its first women's golf program and celebrating Lee Elder's distinguished legacy forever through these scholarships.”

The club's commitment to the local community did not end there.

"In November, Augusta National and our partners at AT&T, Bank of America and IBM donated \$10 million to support the redevelopment and advancement of the Harrisburg and Laney Walker neighborhoods," Ridley said last April at the 2021 Masters of the underserved neighborhoods less than a mile from the club.

"Yesterday, we celebrated one of the first milestones in this long-term commitment at the groundbreaking and construction for the HUB Community Center and the new local Boys & Girls Club headquarters," Ridley said. "These facilities will unlock wonderful opportunities for the residents they serve, including in education, health care and much more. We look forward to sharing additional details as these projects move forward."

Ridley also announced that ANGC had contributed \$2 million jointly with the Community Foundation to support a Covid-19 vaccination center as well as local pop-up clinics and mobile vaccination units in underserved communities.

The current ANGC leadership has expanded the borders of the game of golf worldwide while infusing new energy into communities much closer to home. Payne, Ridley and ANGC have acted in the spirit of Bob Jones, who with Clifford Roberts founded Augusta National in 1930.

As Tevye, the poor Jewish milkman living in the Ukrainian village of Anatevka, said in *Fiddler on the Roof*, "Without our traditions, our lives would be as shaky as a fiddler on the roof." Those words carry even more meaning today for so many reasons.

The traditions of the Masters bring harmony to golf and sweetly serenade the return of spring which, after all, is all about growth. Somehow, it just all feels right.