

The US Masters 1985

The Masters is unique among the majors in that it is always at the same golf course, the Augusta National. That the course was designed by Bobby Jones, a legend himself, makes Augusta even more special. However, the course has been altered many times since then and it seems that almost every year they make some change or other.

There are some special events during the week, such as the past champions' dinner on the Tuesday night. Only the past champions and the chairman of the club are invited, and the reigning champion pays for the dinner. It is always a very special evening and great to dine with Jack, Arnie, Byron Nelson, Tiger Woods and all the other great champions. There used also to be a foreign players' dinner. There are two separate locker rooms, one for champions and one for others. All these things make the Masters a bit special.

When you play in a tournament you usually get free tickets for your family and friends. At the Masters, up until two years ago you had to buy tickets. If you are a Masters champion you are invited back to play in the tournament every year for the rest of your life. For the other majors it is only ten years.

I don't think it is coincidence that I have won my two majors there. I really like the golf course. To play well at Augusta you need to hit precision irons, to have good distance control and a good short game. These are three things I think I'm quite good at. Augusta is a tough golf course and inevitably you are going to miss some greens so you need to be able to chip well and play imaginative shots around the greens to give yourself the chance of saving par.

Again, I am usually good at course management – at thinking my way around the golf course – and that is very necessary in the Masters. You need to have worked out where to hit the ball and where not to hit it.

At Augusta it is necessary to draw the ball from the tee on a number of holes and that is something that comes naturally to me. However, one thing that does not suit me is the length of my tee shot. I could do with hitting the ball a little further.

Although many people may think of me as a poor putter, I do enjoy the fast greens and the challenge of putting at Augusta. However, I would say that some of the greens are not fair, or rather some parts of some greens. But everyone knows that and you just have to make sure that you don't hit the ball to the wrong side of the flag. Take a green like the fourteenth, which has a huge ridge and the pin is often four yards over the ridge. Let's say you hit a shot in and it rolls to the top of the ridge. If it goes over the top it will finish off stiff, a certain birdie. But a shot hit a fraction less hard may get to the top of the ridge, stop and roll back down and off the green, leaving you with a probable bogey. The difference between the ball that just went over the ridge and the one that rolled back is very tiny but may cost the player two shots. The same thing can happen on the ninth and there are several greens where, if you hit the ball to the wrong place, you have no shot.

Sometimes you can hit a worse approach shot and have an easier putt than if you had hit an almost perfect shot. For example, you are better to be forty feet short

with an uphill putt than to be pin high but facing a six-footer downhill or across a slope.

When I was younger I was one of the longest hitters in Europe but that has changed as the equipment has changed and I have got older. Also the courses are getting longer. In 2002 alone they added 300 yards to the Augusta National course – on top of the distance added in previous years. As a result, Augusta is a totally different golf course from what it was ten to fifteen years ago.

In my opinion that plays into the hands of the likes of Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson, John Daly or Davis Love, who can bomb the ball 300 yards or more every time. The difference this makes is whether you are hitting a nine iron or a four iron to the green. And that makes quite a difference to some of the tricky greens at Augusta, particularly when you are hitting off a downhill or sidehill lie, and there are many of them at Augusta National.

The thirteenth and fifteenth are two of my favourite holes. If you hit a good tee shot, you have a chance of going for the green, but over the water. If you hit a bad tee shot then the decision is made: you cannot go for the green. But even if you can go for the green, you do not have to. It partly depends on the shot you are facing and partly on the state of the tournament.

For example, if you are leading by four shots, why take the risk? In those circumstances, I would lay up and leave myself a wedge. However, if you are one or two behind, you are going to have to go for it, as you may not have a better chance to make those shots up. But that is part of the fascination of golf. If you hit a good shot and carry the water, you can get birdie or even eagle. But if you put the ball in the water, you can easily finish up with a seven or an eight.

Another unique feature of the Masters is the par-three competition. This is part of the tradition. It is great fun for the spectators but, in all honesty, pretty meaningless for the players. The par-three course is a wonderful piece of property with flowers, trees and lakes. The greens are as good as on the main course and the atmosphere is amazing. It is like a zoo; there are so many people standing on top of each other around the holes!

Apparently, the winner of the par-three competition has never won the Masters. So if you are superstitious, you don't want to win the par-three competition in case that means you can't win the main tournament. I am not superstitious but I always look at it as a time to have fun rather than as a tournament to win. It is more about entertaining the crowd. For example, the three players might tee off at the same time so that there are three balls in the air at the same time. When I get to the green I might ask a little kid to take my putt and make his day, without worrying if it goes in or not.

As I said earlier, as a Masters champion I get an invite for life. Sam Snead and Gene Sarazen have sometimes teed off and even played a few holes. With my back, somehow I don't think that I will be playing in the Masters when I am ninety!

My first experience of the Masters was in 1982. The first thing that struck me was that I had never seen greens like that before in my life – even though I had played golf around the world I had never encountered such fast and tricky greens.

I finished eleven shots behind the leader and with the ten-shot rule I only missed the cut by one. I played thirty-six holes and had eleven three-putts in all – that is virtually one three-putt every three holes. Of course, you cannot three-putt eleven times and expect to stay in contention. The good news is that I learnt from that experience and when I won, three years later, I had only one three-putt in seventy-two holes.

In 1984 Ben Crenshaw won the Masters. I was thirty-first with seventy-three, seventy, seventy-four and seventy-two, to finish twelve shots behind. I was about fifteenth after two rounds but went backwards from there. Still, it was progress to make the cut and play all four rounds.

I started the 1985 Masters with a seventy-two against Gary Hallberg's sixty-eight. A second-round seventy-four left me six behind Craig Stadler. I had dinner after the second round with a German journalist, Harry Valerian. He remarked that I must be pleased with my performance, as a reasonable finish would ensure a place in the top twenty-four and an invitation back next year. I surprised him by replying, 'Actually Harry, I am aiming to win this tournament.'

I did something very unusual that day too: I changed clubs halfway through the tournament. I wanted to hit the ball a little higher so I changed my irons for the third round.

On the third round I took a gamble and it paid off. On the thirteenth hole I had driven too far right. I was 225 yards from the green and had the small matter of Rae's Creek to negotiate. A good shot with my three wood at that time would carry 230 yards so there was no margin for error. I contemplated the shot and decided that if I was going to win the Masters, I had to go for it. It was not the best three wood I have hit. It was a little thin and low. It bounced short of the water, shot up in the air to clear its first bounce. It came to rest twenty feet from the hole. When I holed the putt for eagle, they wrote down '3' on the card. As they say, it is not how but how many! My gamble had come off.

At the end of the third round Ray Floyd led on four under par. Curtis Strange was second on three under, with Seve and me joint third on two under. It had been an interesting tournament for Curtis. He experienced everything that golf can throw at you in one week. He started with an eighty and was ready to check out of his hotel and go home. A sixty-five in the second round changed all that, and sixty-eight in the third round suddenly put him one shot off the lead. That is the fascination of golf!

The playing order for the final day had me in the second last group with Seve. Curtis and Ray Floyd were in the last group. I had played very steadily all week and knew I had a chance. On the Sunday I did something quite unusual – I decided I wasn't going to look at the leader-board, just play my own game, play as well as I could and see what happened. Sometimes you can look at a leader-board and get depressed because you are too far behind. Other times you can see yourself two shots ahead and be too excited and lose your concentration.

Most of the time I look but I did have a stretch where I played well while not looking at the leader-board. When you think about it, most of the time you don't need to know. But equally you don't want to make the mistake Parnevik made at Turnberry in the Open in 1994, when he didn't know the score and thought he needed to make birdie when he only needed par. He was too aggressive and made bogey. At the same time if you look at the board every hole, you can be so taken up with the scores that you cannot play your own game.

I took six on the second after being in two bunkers but holed from twelve feet for birdie on the third and from sixteen feet on the fifth. I just missed a good birdie chance on the seventh. So I came to the ninth hole, level for the day. I just glanced quickly at the board as I walked to the tenth tee. I couldn't believe it. I started the day two behind and hoped that I might have closed the gap a little – but I found that I was four behind.

I was getting sick and tired of good finishes – second or third – but not winning. I went into the back nine thinking, 'I am going to go for every flag.' I got par at the tenth – it is a difficult hole and a par feels like a birdie – and also parred the eleventh.

The twelfth hole is the par-three over water and even Jack Nicklaus says, when the pin is on the right, you don't go for the pin, you play over the bunker. It leaves you a longer putt but if you mis-hit it slightly, you finish up in the bunker and still have an up-and-down to save par. If you go for the pin and under-hit it, you are in the water.

On this occasion, the pin was back right and I went for it and made birdie. I just kept on shot after shot, attacking every pin – shots that I normally might not have gone for. I got birdies on the thirteenth, fifteenth and seventeenth, and pars on the fourteenth and sixteenth.

I had played the tenth to seventeenth holes in five under. At the same holes Curtis was feeling the pressure. He three-putted the tenth, but then birdied the twelfth. On the thirteenth he hit his second into the creek, decided to play it as it lay and took two to get out. He found water and dropped a shot again on the fifteenth. With my birdie on the fifteenth, I had taken the lead by one from Curtis, two from Seve. The birdie on the seventeenth gave me a two-shot lead on the field.

As I came to the eighteenth I just needed a par for the tournament, barring miracles. I hit a one iron off the tee and a four iron to the green. I found the right bunker but was lying well. I played a good bunker shot to six feet. I read the putt as left lip but it did not break and missed left. I tapped in for my second bogey of the day. Curtis was coming up the eighteenth, needing a birdie for a play-off. In fact he made bogey and I won by two.

But it was an odd feeling as I watched him play the eighteenth on a TV in the scorer's tent. Half of me was wanting to celebrate but the other half of me kept telling myself to keep focused, as Curtis could easily make birdie and then I would have to

play again. When I saw him hit his third shot the relief was incredible. I hugged Vikki. I was Masters champion!

The final positions were: Langer sixty-eight for 282; Strange seventy-one, Floyd seventy-two and Ballesteros seventy shared second place on 284. When the Masters is over, they don't take you to meet the press but instead you immediately do a live TV interview in the Butler Cabin. They give you the green jacket – the traditional winner's prize – and ask you a few questions. They took me into the cabin and I think it was Jim Nance who asked me, 'Did you look at the leader-board? Did you know what was going on in the tournament?'

I replied, 'I was trying not to look but I saw it for the first time at the ninth and I thought, "Jesus Christ, I am playing well and I am four shots behind!" I just said it like that. I didn't mean anything by it. I wasn't a Christian at the time and I just said 'Jesus Christ' without thinking – it was just an expression of surprise that everyone used. Don't forget too that English isn't my first language and that in those days my English was a lot worse than it is now.

Now, as a Christian, I would see it as being disrespectful to the name of God, but at that time without thinking I just said it on national television. When I got home, I was amazed at the reaction. I received letters from a lot of people saying that I had offended them, I should think twice before using the name of God so casually, and so on.

I felt bad because it was just an expression to me and I certainly didn't want to offend anyone. While I wasn't a Christian myself, I had grown up going to church and would never have wanted to offend Christians.

My preparations for the Masters win had been thorough in all but one respect – my wardrobe! It was perhaps not the best day to wear red trousers and a red shirt. When the previous year's champion, Ben Crenshaw, put the green jacket on me, someone said that I looked like a Christmas tree!

Willi Hofmann, my coach, had come over from Germany for the Masters but had to leave before the end of the final round to be back at work on Monday. Willi was literally on the plane home, waiting for take-off, when the captain announced that I had won. Somehow, Willi persuaded them to let him get off the plane and come back to join the celebrations. As Willi had shaped my game during the past nine years I was delighted that he was able to be with us.

Afterwards Vikki and I had dinner at the Augusta National Club with all the members, as tradition requires. Then we visited two Australians before heading back to where we were staying. I had met Frank Williams and David Inglis when I played in the Australian Masters, which they run, earlier that year. They had had a bet on me to win the Masters. They had staked \$3,000. When I won they cleaned up about \$100,000 – not much less than I made for winning the tournament.

As you can imagine they were having quite a party when Vikki and I turned up. We stayed with them for an hour or two. I reckoned they owed me a drink at least! We went to bed but I had difficulty sleeping, I was too excited. I was up early next morning and bought all the papers to convince myself that it had really happened!

Up to that point, my career had been one of steady progress: getting on the tour, winning for the first time, being top of the European money list, making the Ryder Cup team and now, winning a major. Everyone told me that if you were a major winner then that would be the greatest thing, and it was – it was a thrilling event and I was very happy. But it wasn't what I thought it would be and there was still something missing, a feeling of emptiness.

I thought I had achieved everything, even more than I could ever have dreamed of. I had all the money I needed and a beautiful young wife – I had everything! And yet it wasn't enough. It was like, 'Well, where do we go now?' I didn't have real peace. It was as if there was still something missing. I always thought that if you win this tournament, or that tournament, if you made that much money then that's gotta be it. You're gonna feel wonderful. I felt good but I didn't feel wonderful.

I had achieved another of the milestones I had set myself. Great commercial opportunities would open up to me. But underneath it all there was a nagging question – is that it? Is that all there is? I had scaled the mountain but somehow the summit did not seem as exciting when I reached it as I had expected. There was an emptiness within me, saying there must be more to life than this. I was very friendly with Bobby Clampett at that time and still am. Bobby is best known to readers in the UK for his great attempt to win the Open Championship in 1982. The Tuesday of the next week I played a practice round at Hilton Head with Bobby and must have shared some of this with him because he said to me, 'Why don't you come with us to the tour Bible study tomorrow night?'

I said, 'What is that?'

And he explained, 'A group of players and wives just meet for an hour and we read the Bible and pray together.'

I had grown up as a Roman Catholic, so I knew about God and felt comfortable with the idea, so I said, 'Sure, I'll come along.'

I also wanted to know more. As an altar boy in the Catholic Church, I had seen the priest with the Bible but I had never had my own. I figured I had it all together; I believed in God and hoped I would get to heaven. As I got more and more successful, I didn't need God. It was easy with a lifestyle like mine to get all wrapped up in things like cars, houses, position in the world rankings, the money list and so on. It seemed easy to be greedy, jealous and full of myself.

My priorities were golf, golf, and more golf; then myself, and finally a little time with my wife. Every now and then I prayed, but if my golf game was not good, my whole life was miserable, and I made everyone around me miserable.

I always thought just being a good person and keeping the commandments would hopefully get me to heaven. I didn't steal or kill and I tried not to hurt anyone on purpose. But as I got more and more successful, I thought I could do it all myself.

The leader of the study, Larry Moody, was speaking from John, chapter 3. Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again. I had never heard this before, but it was exactly the message I needed to hear. Larry went on to explain what it meant in practical terms. I was amazed to realise that the only way to have eternal

life was through Jesus Christ – that he died for our sins. And that it was not through worthy deeds or good behaviour that one received eternal life, because we can never live up to God's standard. We will always fall short.

I talked to Larry again. I had a lot of questions. I got my own Bible and read sections of it. After a period of time I began to realise that I had to make a choice. As I understood that God loved me so much that he sent his only Son to die for my sins, it was natural for me to ask the Lord into my life. Basically I just had to trust in him to forgive my sins. I had to make him the number one priority in my life, do everything to please him and not try to do it all myself. That hasn't always been easy. At times it has been very difficult because I still have a sinful nature. An extra problem is that the standards of the modern world, where achievement is all, are a lot different from what they are supposed to be.

Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life and no one gets to the Father but through me.' If you realise what this means you've got to stop, think about it for a second and then turn around and really focus on what you are doing in this world. No one in this world is good enough to get to heaven by their own deeds, but at the same time no one is bad enough that they couldn't be saved by Jesus Christ. When I realised that Jesus had died on the cross for my sins, for everybody's sins and I had to give over my life to him, I just recognised that this is the most important step or most important decision that I would ever have to take.

Jesus Christ stopped me in my tracks with his words, 'You must be reborn to enter the kingdom of God.' Since that day in 1985, my faith has played a big part in my life. It puts my priorities in a different order. Before I became a Christian my priorities were all about me and doing well on the golf course. Now my first priority is pleasing God, second is my family and golf only third. I believe when your priorities are right, everything is managed better. Obviously at certain times, like when I am playing a tournament, golf is in a sense number one but overall I try to keep things in perspective so that golf is in its proper place in my life. I think I have been able to work out the right balance of time in my life and try to give sufficient time to the family and not let golf become dominant.

Some people say Christianity is a crutch for the weak. I think that is definitely wrong. I regard myself as a strong person but I need God in my life. Christianity is just a way of life that leads to eternal life with God in heaven and whether you are weak or strong or whether you feel you are fortunate or unfortunate has nothing to do with eternal life at all

My wife, Vikki, felt the same, and she also accepted Christ as her Saviour. Since then, I have seen tremendous changes in her life, my own life, our relationship as husband and wife, and the way we treat our friends and others in this world. It was a life-changing week at Hilton Head and, by the way, I also won the golf tournament, the Sea Pines Heritage Classic.