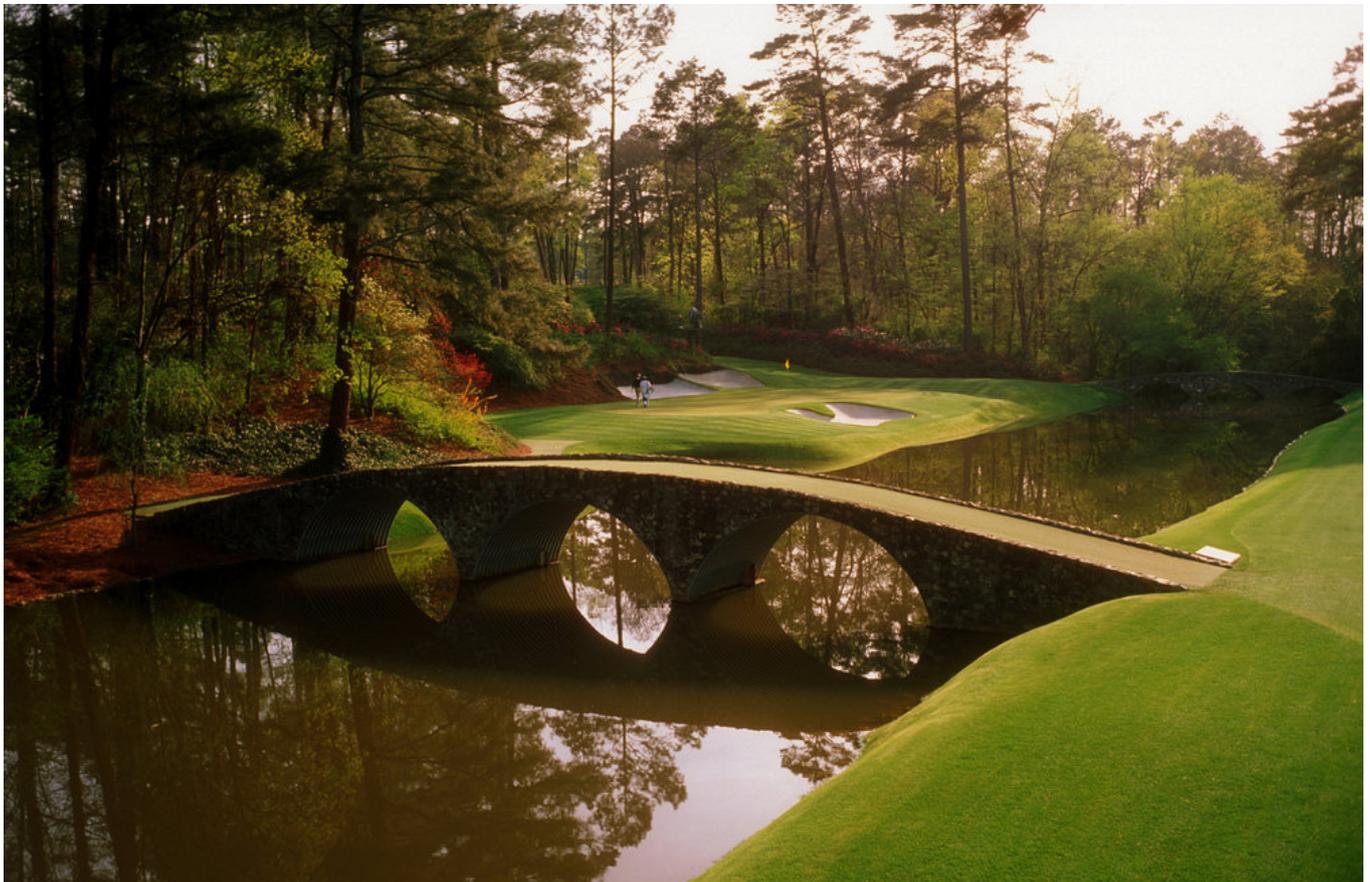


30 HOURS AT AUGUSTA

This time of year marks a special moment in the lives of most golfers. The snow has melted (or is melting), the days are getting longer, the pins are going in at golf clubs around the country, and The Masters is finally here. Year after year, we tune in to watch the world's best golfers compete for the iconic green jacket of Augusta. As viewers, coming back to the same majestic course every season, we have grown to know the purity of the conditions, the subtleties of the greens, the unpredictable winds of #12, and the risk/reward nature of #15 on what feels like a personal level.

However, despite the increasing familiarity of The Masters for avid golf fans, Augusta National itself still holds a deep and mysterious legacy that few people are able to experience in person. Last year, we sat down with TaylorMade's Clay Long about [what it's really like to play Augusta](#). This year, we caught up with Senior Director of Product Creation – Putter & Wedge, Bill Price, to find out more about playing Augusta's par-3 course, sleeping in Butler Cabin, ordering the best food in golf, and how to navigate the greatest course in all of golf.



AUGUSTA IN PERSON

When Nicklaus won in 1986, I was there. It was the first time I set my eyes on Augusta and experienced what it was all about. It was enlightening because it's everybody's dream to see Augusta—and I think every golfer should see Augusta at some point in his or her life.

There's something special about Augusta—it's the beauty of the facility, it's the beauty of the trees, it's the beauty of the grounds, it's the people, it's having food that's affordable, it's all the patrons, it's the natural beauty of the facility... you've never seen anything like it. From the bark around the trees to the flowers and everything else—the natural beauty immediately catches your eye. It caught my eye. You see it on TV so many times, but once you are there and get to see it for yourself, there's nothing like it.

I've had the privilege of seeing some of the best courses in the world in person, but Augusta has a natural beauty that is unlike anything else. Everywhere you look, it's just like, "wow." It's just non-stop, "wow, wow, wow."

AN INVITE TO PLAY

I played Augusta 25 years later in spring of 2011. Our CEO at the time, Mark King, extended me an invite to play Augusta.

The experience of playing Augusta begins when you're on Washington Street, before turning onto Magnolia Lane. There's no signage or anything to indicate you're nearing Augusta—you just pull in and there's a guard at the gate. Once you're there, there are no cell phones. So the guard insisted we shut off our phones before letting us in.

Then we were driving down Magnolia lane with all the trees and everything in full bloom—it gave me goose bumps. It was pretty spectacular. Once we were actually on the grounds, the environment was very relaxing and very peaceful, as you would imagine. Of course, I was still nervous inside—you can't help but be a little nervous. You're in a place that you've dreamed of your entire life.

THE PAR 3



We got there in the afternoon, and the first thing we did was change at our lockers before heading out to play the par-3 course. Now, I'm not sure how many people get to play the par-3 course, let alone Augusta itself, but we were certainly very lucky to get to do both. And I have to tell you; it was the hardest par-3 course I've ever played. The greens are as fast, if not faster, than Augusta. They're small little greens and you're only hitting short irons into everything, but the greens were just so fast that they played incredibly tough—it really set the tone for what we were going to experience the next day out on the course.

We also had caddies with us, which was a surprise at first, but I soon realized they were very much needed to help us play smart shots and read the greens. After a couple holes, I started to get the sense that there was a little betting going on between the caddies because they were clearly rooting for and against certain shots! You could just feel the competitiveness of Augusta even at a place as seemingly casual as the par-3 course.



THE FOOD, THE CLUBHOUSE, AND BUTLER CABIN

After we played the par 3, they took us on a tour through the clubhouse. First, we went up to the Crow's Nest where all the amateurs stay. It was a basic, open room with simple partitions separating the different sleeping areas. It was essentially a single room that they would all have to share during the tournament. All I could imagine was the trouble amateurs would have getting to sleep if someone had a snoring problem...

Then we went to dinner in the clubhouse. We sat down among other members, each wearing their signature green jacket, so it was very much 'coat and tie' dining. As far as food goes, everything you've heard about eating in Augusta's clubhouse is true—no matter what you want, they'll make it for you. There is a physical menu, but you can truly ask for whatever you want. The food there is spectacular. Absolutely spectacular. There's nothing like it. The food, the drinks, and the wine are unlike anything in the world.

After dinner, we went to Butler Cabin where we were staying that night. We shared a few more drinks inside the cabin before everyone turned in and tried to get as much sleep as we could. My room was down to the left, right next to where Jim Nantz does his interview after the tournament next to the fireplace—there must've been four bedrooms downstairs near where the trophy room was.

Then the next morning, we got up to play Augusta.



JUST MAKE CONTACT

It's tough to get your nerves in check and as you walk over to the first tee after warming up. As soon as you step up to #1 tee, it all starts to hit you. You can't help but just sit back and think, "wow, I'm actually about to play Augusta." Looking down that first fairway, there's a big swale that you hit up to and there's a bunker on the right... really all you're trying to do is make contact.

I put a good swing on my first drive, despite my nerves, and ended up about three yards off the fairway. I hit the green on my approach and had a nice two-putt par. I was relieved that I was able to make par, but I knew I still had to settle my nerves if I was to continue playing well... However, that didn't really work out because my front 9 ended up being a little bit of a disaster.

At Augusta, you quickly find out that you just can't put yourself in certain positions or you'll be in big trouble. That's what happened to me a few times on the front. I overcooked my drive on hole #2, which ended up costing me. On hole 3—hitting a wedge into that tiny little green—if you miss it, it can easily become a score of six or seven. Hole 4 was really tough as well, but there were a lot of holes that were tough—not so much from tee-to-green, but incredible tough on the greens... and even tougher when you miss the greens.

The undulations on the greens are *wild*, absolutely wild. It's incredible how severe they are. You see a bit of it on TV, but you can't really understand how extreme it can be unless you actually go there or *play* there. I immediately realized the type of challenge that Tour players are faced with, especially when they miss a green.

It's all about perfection when you hit your approach. It's not an easy course by any means, but the fairways are generous, so it really comes down to your approach into the greens and how you're able to handle the massive undulations once you get there. If you miss, you pay the price. It can be impossible.

ANXIETY AT THE 7TH



A few holes later, we were standing on tee box of the 7th. For whatever reason, I've always had this little quirky superstition where I play with red tees—so I had a couple red tees in my pocket and was getting ready to tee up the ball.

Then, all the sudden, there was a golf cart that was driving around toward the back of the 7th tee and it stopped about 60 yards behind the tee box. The guy in the cart was kind of just sitting there with his arms crossed, watching us. After seeing this, my caddy leaned in and whispered, "Make sure you use a white tee." And I looked at him like, *why?* He whispered back, "That's William Porter Payne... just use a white tee." So now the pressure was really on with the chairman of Augusta watching me tee off. Fortunately, I hit a solid tee shot and my ball found its way into the fairway.

Now that I was in the fairway and the pressure of Mr. Payne watching us had passed, I was ready for my approach. I could see that the pin was tucked on the left side, and my caddy provided me with some simple advice, "Just don't go left of the pin."

Of course, I went left of the pin. I was only about 15 feet away from the green, but I didn't have much green to work with. Again, my caddy leaned in and said, " Just don't go past the pin." I knew that if I bumped it up there and just made it to the fringe, I could two-putt and make bogey. It's OK to walk away with bogey—just take a 6 or 7 out of play. That was the learning curve of Augusta: take the big misses out of play and be OK with making some bogeys—and that's what I did on #7.

BATTLE ON THE BACK

By hole 10, my nervousness was gone and I was able just play golf. Standing on the 10th tee, I was shocked at how downhill the hole was from the tee to the green—it could've been a ski slope. It was severely downhill, angled right to left, and you needed to turn it over and catch that hill to let the ball run out—otherwise you'd be left with an incredibly long approach shot. Of course, I wasn't able to draw it, so I was left with a long shot into the green. Fortunately, I pulled off a shot that got me to the front edge of the green, but the pin was tucked way in the back.



I remember the putt so clearly, because if I didn't have a caddy, I could've rolled it straight off the green. It was probably a 60-foot putt and I was planning on playing about 5-8 feet of break from right to left. Luckily, the caddy stopped me and said, "You see that scoreboard pole back there? You gotta aim there." *He was lining me up about 20 feet away from the hole!* Then he added, "It's also downhill. It's FAST." And sure enough, it took the slope at a lightning-fast speed, broke about 20 feet, and lagged up near the hole for an easy par. His read easily saved me from making bogey or even worse.

I was able to par 10, 11, and 12. On 13, I hit it in Rae's Creek and was still able to save bogey, so I considered that a win.



On the par-5 15th, I was in the fairway off the tee and hit my 3-wood over the green to the right. Despite missing the green, I was feeling pretty good. I was over the green in two and knew I should be able to make par or even get up and down for birdie. But before I chipped up onto the green, my caddy comes over, looks at my chip, and says, "You've got no chance. This is an impossible chip." *That's what he says to me!* It was the last thing I wanted to hear.

But then I looked at it again and I realized I had to chip it over some grass, get it far enough to stay up on the green, and keep it short enough to avoid rolling off the green and into the pond. I could feel that my caddy was nervous for me, and that made me even more nervous than I already was! But wouldn't you know it—I chipped it up onto the green and made a 10-footer for my only birdie of the day.

My caddy couldn't believe it, so to prove his point, he had me go back and try the chip again. *He was right.* If I didn't hit the 1-out-of-100 chip that I did, it would've been a difficult two-putt or in the water.

It takes you a while to get used to those types of shots at Augusta. You're constantly in positions where you have to play the most delicate shots you can imagine—and you have to hit them perfect. If you don't hit them perfect, there can be extreme consequences.

WRAPPING UP THE ROUND

As I was coming down the final stretch, I found myself wanting to slow down a little bit, linger back to hit more shots, and take in the surroundings. There was something special about those final moments. I didn't want it to end.

My goal heading into the round was to break 80. Starting with a 42 on the front wasn't a great start, but I got my head together on the back nine and played some solid golf. When I got to 18, I knew that if I could just par the final hole, I would sneak in with a 79. I hit a nice tee shot and a decent approach, but I left myself with a really difficult two-putt. I ended up with a 3-putt bogey on 18 to shoot 80.

It was disappointing to miss out on my goal by a single stroke, but as I rolled in that final putt and took off my cap to shake hands with my playing partners, it was impossible not to feel great about the round I had just experienced.



REFLECTING ON AUGUSTA

To play well at Augusta, it all comes down to your short game. You don't have to be a great driver of the ball to play there. The fairways are generous. They allow you to spray the ball a little bit, so if you're playing well around the green, you can score pretty well. It's all about the short game: chipping and putting.

If I were to give one piece of advice for anyone with the chance to play Augusta it would be to never say no. No matter what you need to cancel—cancel whatever plans you have to play Augusta, including anniversaries and anything else.

To go to Augusta and see The Masters is one thing, but playing it is on a completely other level. It more unique than any other course I've ever played. Just be sure you always have your bags packed and ready to go if you ever get the opportunity to play Augusta.

Every sport has its premiere event. For baseball, it's the World Series. For football, it's the Super Bowl. For golf, it's the Masters. Augusta is *the* week for the golf world. It's the best course, the best players, the best atmosphere, the best conditions, the best landscaping... it's the best of everything.

ABOUT TAYLORMADE GOLF

About TaylorMade Golf Company

Headquartered in Carlsbad, California, TaylorMade Golf Company sells golf equipment, footwear, apparel and accessories under the TaylorMade, adidas Golf, Adams and Ashworth brands.

About the adidas Group

The adidas Group is a global leader in the sporting goods industry, offering a broad portfolio of footwear, apparel and hardware for sport and lifestyle around the core brands adidas, Reebok, TaylorMade and Reebok-CCM Hockey. Headquartered in Herzogenaurach, Germany, the Group employs more than 55,000 people across the globe and generated sales of around € 17 billion in 2015.



TaylorMade Golfnewsroom