

Russ Pankonin

A commentary on sports

It's every avid golfer's dream to attend The Masters at Augusta National in Augusta, Ga.

The beauty. The history. The tradition. The Masters!

For me, that dream came true last week. And as far as I am concerned, I've been to the Mecca and back again.

The scenario that took me and my wife to the Masters began last year during March Madness. As the commercials played for the Masters during the final four, I lamented to my wife, Lori, how another year had come and gone and I still hadn't made it to the Masters.

"Well, then let's go," she said.

"Are you serious?"

"Sure."

Indeed, she was serious so I wasn't going to miss this opportunity. I told her to book the dates for this year's Masters on her calendar and I'd start planning.

We dubbed the upcoming trip our "50-30" trip.

On Saturday, Lori joins her husband among the ranks of those that are 50 years old. Plus, this August will mark our 30th wedding anniversary.

So what better way to mark several milestones in our lives than by going to the Masters.

Lori's not quite the avid golfer that I am but she does enjoy watching the game.

So, with her approval in hand, I began checking out travel packages.

Masters tickets, or badges, as they are referred to, can be hard to come by but not impossible, especially if you buy them as part of a package.

As luck would have it, the executive director of our press association knew a friend in Lincoln who had booked a Masters trip with a friend who runs a tour agency in Phoenix.

With a few phone calls, we'd made connections and the trip was set.

We planned to attend the first day of the tournament on Thursday and then travel on to Savannah, Ga., for some R&R.

We scheduled the trip so we would arrive for Wednesday's practice round, even though we didn't have tickets.

The key thing about the practice rounds are that fans can take their cameras on to the grounds. On Wednesday morning, with my camera on my shoulder and Lori at my side, we ventured down to one of the main gates, hoping to score a pair of passes as people left.

As a neophyte to the tournament, it took me a little while to figure out what was going on. But eventually, after missing out on several opportunities, I caught on to the scalping process.

After about two hours of growing impatient, I finally scored a pair of passes to get us in the gate.

While looking for tickets, I ran across a lady and her daughter who said they were heading in and heading right back out—as soon as they got the ashes of their husband/dad spread on Amen Corner.

The lady explained her husband loved golf and in December, he died while playing golf. His

wish was to have his ashes spread on a golf course.

His wife and daughter did him proud, spreading his ashes at not just any course but at the holy grail of golf!

The Masters is full of tradition. From a pimento cheese sandwich for just \$1.50 to the practice of putting your chair down in the morning at your favorite spot and coming back in the afternoon and it's still there waiting for you.

And of course, there's the pro shop where every Masters fan has to stock up on goodies. No phone orders. No online orders. No catalog orders.

These prized items are available only at the tournament—period.

Oh, and the golf—it's second to none.

The Masters is the holy grail of golf and if you love the game, you need to go at least once in your lifetime. It's an experience you'll never forget!