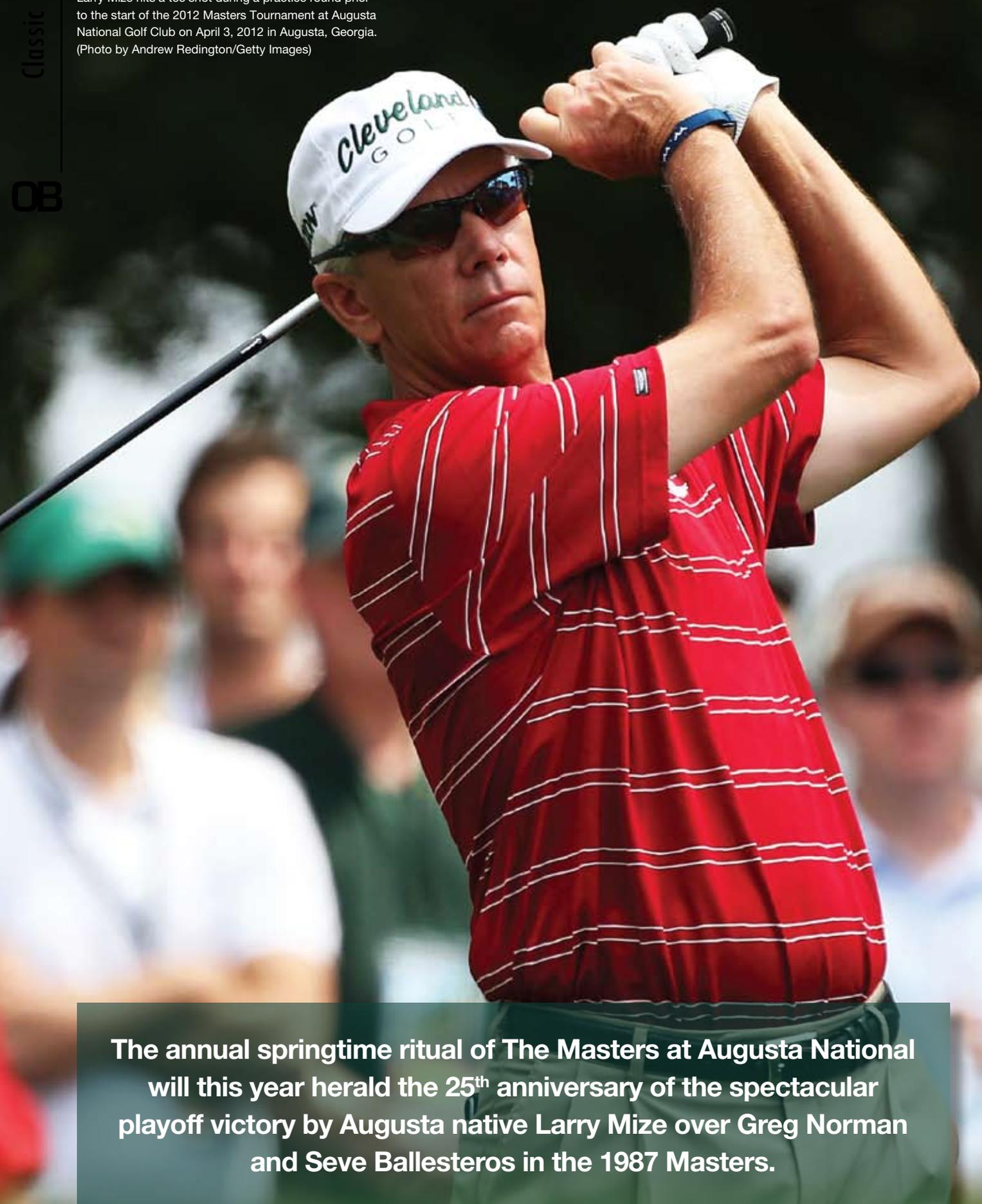


Larry Mize hits a tee shot during a practice round prior to the start of the 2012 Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club on April 3, 2012 in Augusta, Georgia. (Photo by Andrew Redington/Getty Images)



The annual springtime ritual of The Masters at Augusta National will this year herald the 25th anniversary of the spectacular playoff victory by Augusta native Larry Mize over Greg Norman and Seve Ballesteros in the 1987 Masters.

Celebrating 25 YEARS as a Masters champion LARRY MIZE

The now 53 year old Georgian, who's first job was selling Christmas trees, had all his Christmases come at once when chipping in from well to the right of the 11th green, driving another stake in the heart of Greg Norman following the anguish of the Bob Tway holed bunker shot on the 72nd hole of the previous year's US PGA Championship at Inverness CC.

The Champions Tour regular reflects on that career defining moment, that fateful chip and his dreams of playing well again at Augusta this year.

It's nice to be asking you about your good play of late, as well as the 25th anniversary of your Masters win in '87. That was some golf by the field in Naples a few weeks ago.

I had a nice week (The Champions Tour's Ace Group Classic in Naples, Florida). Unfortunately we have a 3 week break now and I'm ready to keep playing! It was awfully good golf. I shot 62 in the 1st round to lead 3 players by only two shots, followed it up with a 67 and I'm behind by three! Pretty amazing (laughing).

It seems that the Champions Tour play goes up a level every year. More players are playing right up to their 50th birthday these days, not having a hiatus for 5 years or so as was the case not long ago.

It sure seems that way to me and when I talk to some of the older players, they certainly say

it's gotten a lot more competitive out there than it was a few years back. The older players have made it such a wonderful tour that all these guys in their 40s are managing their bodies and their games to get ready for the Champions Tour. They're coming out ready to go and excited about it. It's certainly adding to the competition out there. It keeps all of us on our toes, we have to keep working hard to be able to stay out there and keep playing.

When you play like that leading up to The Masters, do you harbour hopes of maybe doing what Greg Norman did in '08 and Tom Watson in '09 at the British and getting into contention at Augusta?

Oh yeah, no doubt, I can't help but think like that. The competitor in you makes you think you can do it, maybe not on a week by week basis, but in certain weeks and Augusta is one of those weeks even though the course is so long and hard. I still believe I can get in the mix a little bit and last week encourages me to keep pushing and hopefully be peaking by The Masters.

So it's not a 'ceremonial' week for you in any way?

No, not at all. I still think I can compete in the tournament and I'm working hard to get in there (in contention) a little bit.

Winning the Masters and joining that exclusive club is something everyone dreams about but it's especially significant for you being an Augusta native. How does it feel

now after 25 years as a Masters Champion?

As the years go by, you grow and learn to appreciate it more. I just realise what a tremendous win that was for me and to get to go back there every year to compete, see all the champions at the Champions Dinner. The other thing is it's hard to believe it's been 25 years too, I told someone today that I'm not that old! You really just appreciate the tournament more and more. For me to even 'play' in the tournament was a dream come true but to win it as an Augusta boy was just incredible.

Looking back to your recollections of the week in 1987. It was a tough week, only 3 under par got into the playoff.

The greens were just unbelievably hard. I'll never forget John Cook and I were in the last group on Friday and we were standing on the 4th tee and the staff are hand watering the 3rd green with little watering cans with a spout, like you would water flowers. The water is not even seeping into the green. It was like the hood of a car, it was just beading up and running off the green!

The greens had that blueish, brown tint to them and were incredibly fast so that's why the scores were so high that year.

Looking at who you were up against in that playoff (Greg Norman and Seve Ballesteros), they were regarded as two of the kingpins of the day. You were never regarded as a long hitter but an exceptional putter. Do you

think that balanced it out for you around Augusta, having that good short game?

I would never argue with getting a little longer, there's no doubt. I've been good around the greens and getting the ball in the hole so it's been somewhat of an equaliser, there's no question. I had a tall order going up against Seve and Greg in that playoff. For me, the way I'd played that week and the birdie on the 72nd hole gave me a nice boost and a lot of confidence going into the playoff.

I had a calm nervousness about me because I had played well all week. I'd been in a playoff with Greg the previous year at the Kemper so I think that helped, knowing it wasn't my first playoff with Greg was a positive.

Did you give any thought at the time to the fact that Greg had a pretty crushing loss in the previous Major (the PGA in 1986, when Bob Tway holed from the bunker on the last hole to beat him) and that Seve had had a similar loss in the Masters to Jack Nicklaus the previous year? Did you think these things 'might' be playing on their minds in this playoff?

It never entered my mind. It's funny though, no-one has ever brought that up before, but it's an interesting point that I hadn't thought about.

Were you shocked to see Seve miss that short putt

on the 10th to fall out of the playoff?

Yes definitely, I did not expect him to miss that putt. I expected us to all be going to the next hole after all missing our birdie putts. **I know Ben Hogan used to say that if you ever saw him on the green on 11, you knew he'd missed the shot, but you looked quite disgusted when you left your 5 iron approach out to the right on the 11th?**

I was disgusted and I don't know that I knew that quote at that time. I was trying to hit it on the green because Greg was obviously well ahead of me in the fairway, I think he may have had about an 8 iron in there. I was trying to hit a good shot but I subconsciously didn't want to hit it in the water so I just blocked it out to the right.

I've tried to think of various questioning angles to ask you about the famous chip shot but I thought I'd simply ask if you could just take me though it, what you were thinking when you surveyed the shot and so forth?

One of the great things about the shot was that I only carried a 56 degree sand wedge. We've talked about how hard and fast the greens were so I knew there was no way I could carry the ball on the green and keep it on there. The only shot I thought I could play was a pitch and run and I knew I still needed some loft on the club because it could still run across the green into the water. So there was only one shot to play and only one club to play it with – the 56 degree sand wedge. So that was a real bonus, there was no indecision so I could just commit to the shot. I'd had about an 18 or 20 foot par putt on the same line in regulation which I'd made, so I knew what the ball was going to do when it got on the green. So I just picked the spot to land it and wanted to hit a good aggressive shot to get it somewhere near the hole for a par putt to put the pressure back on Greg.

Obviously though, the ball went in, there was pandemonium and you danced around the green like Hale Irwin was to do a few years later in the US Open! It was a touch of class from you in that moment though to gather yourself to hush the crowd to allow Greg to play.

(Laughing) I was pretty excited as you could see!

You know, it's a gentleman's game and we're all trying to carry on that part of the game throughout. Greg deserved to have a calm time to play his shot.

You've probably been asked to replicate that shot many times, even though that green is a little different now and it would be hard to do again?

It is a little different and you know I have never been back to that spot or tried that shot again. It's one of the best decisions I've ever made. I think there's no reason to ever do it again, I see it as a 'lose, lose' situation. One of the magazines wanted me to go back and do it again and I said no. So now, every time I see it replayed again it's still a pure memory. People ask where it is and I say 'it's over there somewhere'.

I'm not exactly sure where it is anyway and especially now that they've re-done (the green). So I've never played that shot again and don't plan on playing it unless I hit it there in the tournament.

To be an Augusta native, where you'd worked as a scoreboard attendant on the 3rd hole in your teens, to win the tournament in such a dramatic fashion and be presented with the Green Jacket by the greatest of all time, Jack Nicklaus: Could the reality of what happened actually exceed what you'd dreamed about all your life?

I couldn't have scripted it any better. I beat two great players and I got the jacket from the greatest player of all time. Getting the jacket from Jack was just the cherry on top of the sundae, it just couldn't have been any better for me.

How is your relationship with Greg? It was obvious a tough situation for him.

We have a good relationship, he handled it great. I remember we went to Hilton Head the next week and we were in the locker room together and I commented to him that 'I thought you handled it great last week, like always' and he said thanks and some other nice things to me, which I appreciated.

We get along great, I like Greg and far as I know, he likes me. It's nothing personally, it's just golf. We're all there trying to beat each other and that's just the way the game is. I'm sure he hated it and if the roles were reversed, I would have hated it too.

Which players are you liking the look of for this year's Masters?

It's hard to believe an Australian hasn't won it. Phil (Mickelson) is playing really well right now, Bill Haas is playing really well and with Luke Donald, it's just a matter of time the way he plays. If Rory putts like he did at the US Open last year, he has the game to win there, no doubt.

I read on your PGA Tour bio that one course you wish you could have played was Royal Melbourne in Australia?

You know, I came down there to play the Australian Masters at Huntingdale in about '88. We had a great time, went up to Sydney, Cairns, Brisbane and then down to Melbourne. I got a chance to play Kingston Heath and I just loved it, I thought Kingston Heath was just a wonderful golf course but I didn't have time to play Royal Melbourne. Hopefully, one day I will.

Your son Robert is a talented player at Furman. Has watching him develop and playing with him been a spark for your own game?

Yes, I think it really has. He's a nice player and it's been fun. I don't know that I needed a spark to keep me interested but it's a nice thing to keep me going. I remember Jay Haas saying once that he didn't want to be the 3rd best player in the family, so that definitely can be a positive!

Having won a Major, played Ryder Cup, won multiple times on Tour, in Japan and a 10 shot romp against a Major-quality field in the Johnny Walker World Championship in Jamaica in 1993, do you ever feel you're often only associated with that chip shot and victory as opposed to a broader recognition of a fine career?

I don't really give it much thought. As far as my career goes, there are a lot worse ways to be remembered than for the chip in at Augusta. I guess with it happening at such a tremendous tournament with a world-wide effect, I can see how that could happen but its fine with me. I'm proud of my career but I guess I accept the fact that I'll mostly be remembered for the chip in and win at Augusta.

Finally, as you play The Masters every year, do you sneak a peek at that scoreboard you worked at on 3 every year!?

You know, I do! I do look at it with fond memories because I worked there for 2 years as a teenager and had a great time doing it. When I walk past, it's a special spot for me, no question. There's a ladder on the back and we'd open up the windows where the numbers go to peek out, even though they didn't want us to do that in the tournament. I look back at that and shake my head that's it's been 25 years since I won. The son that was one week short of a year old when I won was married on March 3rd, so we had our first wedding! My wife and I shed a few tears that night but he married a great girl and we're all really excited for them..



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