

Augusta prepares for Masters madness

'You would think the pope was coming,' says local

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — When golfing's galaxy descends on this small city each year, suburban homes turn into boarding houses, the quiet airport becomes a mini-O'Hare, little-used limousines are booked solid and displaced pets fill kennels. Caterers and restaurant workers become incredibly busy.

And, if you're going to Augusta for this week's Masters tournament, you might want to pack your own towels.

Perhaps no more modest a U.S. city plays host to a bigger event than the Masters, which brings in at least 225,000 people for the only major men's golf tournament held at the same site each year. That's well above the normal 192,000 population of Augusta-Richmond County.

When Bobby Jones invited the world's top players to Augusta in 1934, he couldn't foresee the impact the growing tournament would have.

With only 5,500 hotel rooms, Augusta has developed a cottage industry of more than 2,000 homeowners who rent their homes for the week.

A quick inventory of housewares at local department stores gives the date away: Sheets, towels, pillows and rugs are in short supply as people stock up for their guests — mostly golfers and cor-

porate executives.

"It's amazing. You would think the pope was coming," said Elaine Gillespie, who plans to use her \$1,900 rental fee to install hardwood floors.

The leases net owners tidy, tax-free profits of \$1,500 to \$15,000 for the week, minus the 7 percent commission charged by the two biggest rental agencies.

Years ago, Augusta schools used Masters week for spring break, allowing teachers, students and their families to head for the beach and avoid the crowds, or to stay home and pick up the numerous one-week jobs created by the tournament.

Some teachers work as maids or caterers, and many students work at Augusta National, doing everything from serving food to hauling equipment for journalists.

The Masters brings in an estimated \$110 million in revenues, said Barry White, executive director of the Augusta Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Among those enjoying the boon are kennels, as hundreds of families evacuate but leave the pets behind; caterers, to serve the nightly corporate soirees, and limo drivers, a rare enterprise in the piney woods of eastern Georgia.

For the past decade, Babs and Norman

Schaffer have fled the crowds and spent the second week of April at the beach — Hilton Head, S.C.; Pensacola, Fla.; Cancun, Mexico, or Bermuda.

"I grew up in North Augusta and I've lived my golfing years," said Babs Schaffer, who charges \$3,000 to \$5,000 for their four-bedroom home. "I like to go on what I call a free trip."

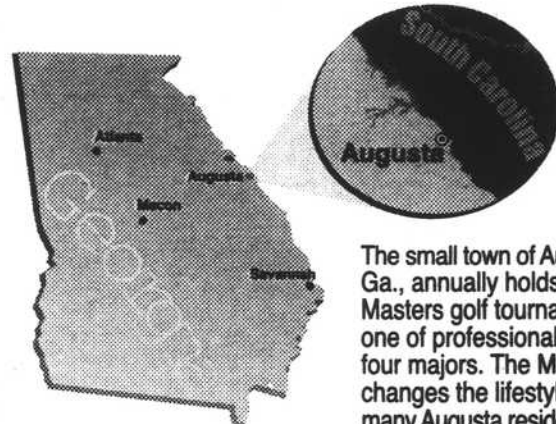
Since 1995, the Schaffers have rented to the same well-known golfer she declines to identify. Renting to the same family makes the job easier.

In addition to the trips, the Schaffers have used Masters money to install a pool, build an addition to their home and renovate their kitchen.

She considers the Masters motivation for giving her home "a good spring cleaning."

Most agencies require homeowners to empty their refrigerators, clean out a few drawers for guests' clothes, and make closet space available. Homeowners report that golfers are typically

The Masters



The small town of Augusta, Ga., annually holds The Masters golf tournament, one of professional golf's four majors. The Masters changes the lifestyle of many Augusta residents for one week.

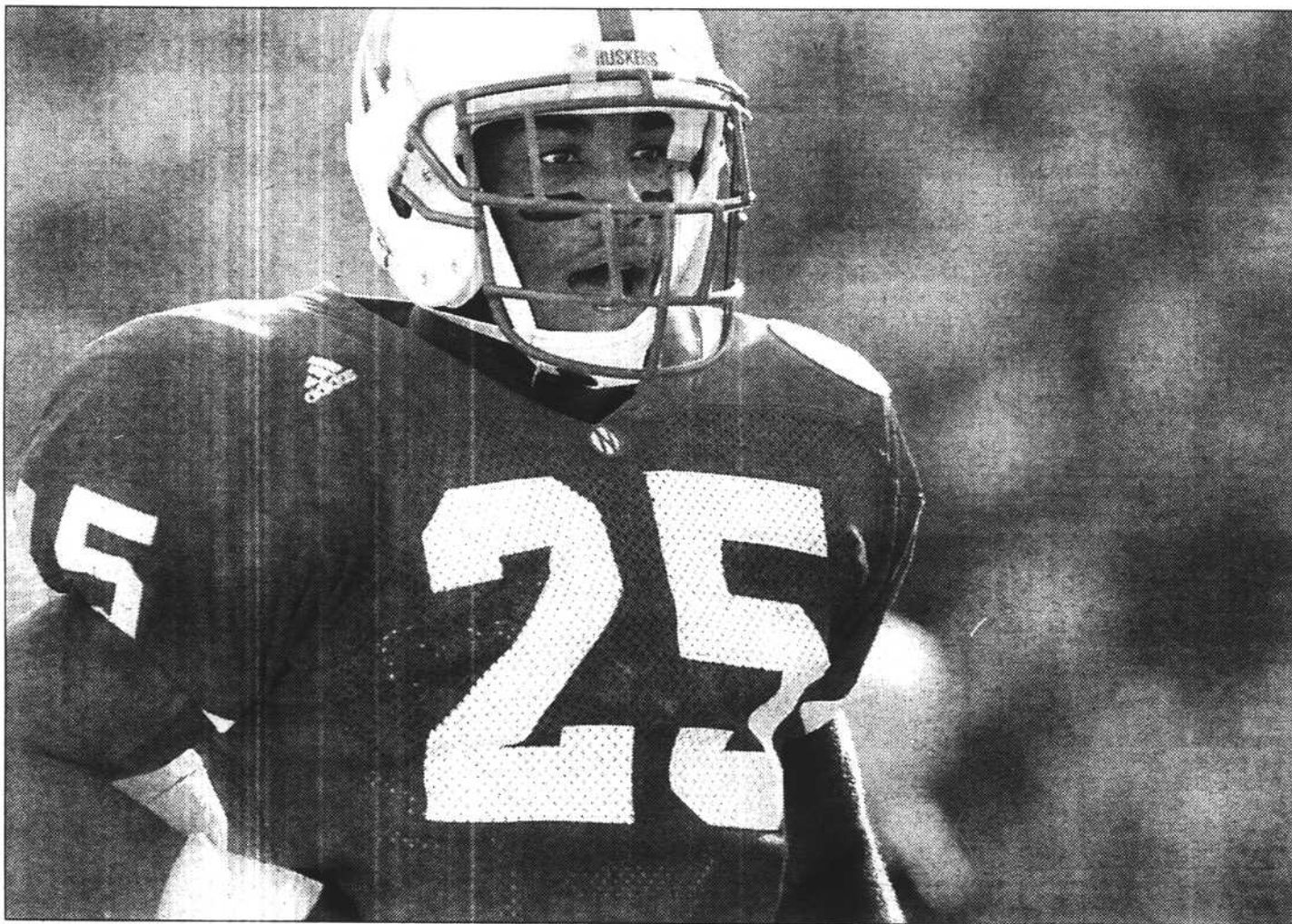
JON FRANK/DN

fussier renters than corporations and individuals.

"I had a golfer call me and tell me the pillows weren't fluffy enough," Diane Starr, president of Corporate Quarters, said.

Augusta's normally sleepy airport, Bush Field,

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DN FILE PHOTO

JOE WALKER is injured, but could play a key role in the Nebraska return teams next fall.

Walker recovers from injury

BY JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

It's hard for a football player to do the things necessary to reach success. If you ask Joe Walker, it is harder not to be able to do anything at all.

During the 1998 season, Joe Walker was making history by becoming only the sixth player in college football history to return a punt, a kickoff and an interception for touchdowns.

Walker was poised to make an impact in the Holiday Bowl against Arizona until he fell to the Memorial Stadium turf Dec. 12 during special teams practice.

The result was a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee. Walker, who was the team's top return man, was forced into a spectator's role for the bowl game.

"It was like a baby reaching for candy and they just can't get it," Walker said. "I just wanted to do something for my team so bad."

The knee injury has also kept Walker out

of spring practice this year. Instead of returning kicks and covering receivers, the junior can often be seen sitting in the stands watching his teammates practice.

For now, Walker can only watch and go through a strenuous rehabilitation period to restore the strength in his knee.

"It has made a little mental toll on me," Walker said. "But I understand my injury is something I have to fight through."

The inside of the training room is something Walker has grown accustomed to the last few months.

Right now, Walker said, he is working on going through the motions to get the foundation back in his knee. He won't be on the field for the spring, but Walker said he'll be ready when the two-a-day workouts come around this fall.

"I have to prove I still have the capabilities," Walker said. "I'm just trying to make it back to the field first."

When Walker does come back, he said, all he wants to do is get his hands on the ball.

Last season, he had no problem doing that.

"As long as the ball is in my hands I feel I can do something with it."

JOE WALKER
NU football player

The Arlington, Texas, native intercepted three passes last year, including a 65-yard return for a touchdown against Iowa State.

And then there is Walker's work on special teams. Walker grabbed 25 punts for 283 yards, and returned 17 kickoffs for 366 yards.

When the rehabilitation is over and Walker returns to the field, he said he is ready to do anything — even play offense if he is asked to.

"As long as the ball is in my hands I feel I can do something with it," Walker said. "I can

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NU freshmen fill gap left by injured Walker

■ Mike Demps and DeJuan Groce promise Husker fans they will like what they see from defensive backs.

BY DARREN IVY
Senior staff writer

An injury to Nebraska's top returning kick and punt returner before the Holiday Bowl last season has left Craig Bohl scratching his head about who to use this spring to return kicks.

Without Joe Walker, the return duties have been opened up to a number of people, said Bohl, NU's linebacker coach, who also works with kick returners.

"I hate to tell you, but we are really unsettled right now," Bohl said. "We're just trying to get guys who can catch the ball."

Freshmen Michael Demps and DeJuan Groce have emerged as frontrunners for the spots.

Demps and Groce aren't exactly household names for Cornhusker fans. Neither player has seen any action at NU. Looking just at paper, Demps and Groce said, they can understand if people have worries and concerns about the return game.

"You really can't knock them," Demps said. "They really don't know what we have. All they can do is go off whenever they see us return a kick."

"I think it is only going to take one return. The first time they see us return a kick, they will know the person they put back there is good enough to return a kick for Nebraska."

Added Groce: "It's not like (the coaches) are just going to put anybody back there. You never know what could happen."

Groce and Demps both are speedy defensive backs. Groce runs a 4.5-second 40-yard dash and Demps has similar speed when he is healthy.

But speed is just one aspect of a good return man, Groce said.

"You have to have a clear mind," Groce said. "You must focus on the ball. It takes concentration. You can't worry about the man coming down the middle at you. You need quick thoughts. Once you catch the ball, you have to be real snappy."

In the first scrimmage April 2, Groce returned three punts for 29 yards.

Both players watched what Walker did last year. Walker was a big-play guy, scoring touchdowns on a punt return and kick-off return.

Demps and Groce have set goals to be big-play guys as well.

"You can win games with just offense and defense," Demps said. "But special teams play a big

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