

World Golf Hall Of Fame Induction Ceremony

Monday, June 10 2019

Billy Payne Induction Speech

FRED RIDLEY: From the University of Georgia to the magical night in Atlanta when Mohammed Ali lit the flame of the Centennial Olympic Games, Billy Payne blazed a trail in sports like few people in history. Those accomplishments alone would have satisfied the most ambitious of people. But Billy had other ideas when he was given the privilege to serve as chairman of Augusta National Golf Club. He brought his energy and passion to one of the greatest games ever played. A game that has been the beneficiary of his vision and imagination.

I first met Billy Payne in 2001 at East Lake Golf Club, the course where Bobby Jones learned the to play. He was the keynote speaker at the U.S. Amateur and he talked about his life in sports. Little did we know there was another chapter ahead for Billy. And for me, that I would have the honor of standing side by side with him on golf's greatest stage.

Billy did not come to Augusta National as a golf insider, but what he lacked in a golfing pedigree he made up for with hard work. He read every piece of correspondence in the club's archives. He embraced the vision of Bobby Jones and Clifford Roberts' uncompromising standard of perfection. Billy followed their mandate of constant improvement. And he knew his responsibility to give back to the game that had given them so much.

Billy's energy and enthusiasm were infectious. And the Augusta National members quickly realized they had never met anyone quite like him. He had big ideas but at the same time focused on every single detail. Today the tangible results of Billy's vision are evident at the Masters tournament. Berckmans place, the magnificent new press building and the patron golf shop, all facilities that are unparalleled in sports.

But his impact on the game of golf has been much greater than those impressive structures. Just ask the people whose lives Billy Payne touched. The leaders of the game from around the world he has brought together to promote and expand golf. By those aspiring golfers from far reaching regions of Asia and Latin America, they competed for the chance to play with their idols in Augusta National and became heroes to others in their countries. And certainly ask the 80



boys and girls who each Sunday before the Masters compete at Augusta National in the Drive, Chip and Putt National Finals.

Through his chairmanship Billy Payne was a champion for the game of golf. His legacy rests on an understanding of the immense power of relationships and his ability to inspire dreams in others. Through his affection and appreciation he empowered an army of friends who shared the values and lessons that golf teaches.

Who can forget that moment just two years ago at the Masters tournament when Billy delivered a touching tribute to the career and life of the legendary Arnold Palmer. Billy Payne: Arnold Palmer was my friend. He was your friend. Despite for all his fame and fortune he always had time for all of us.

It was at that moment the world saw the person I am honored to introduce tonight. A man who is thoughtful, passionate and caring. A true friend to our sport. So at this time on behalf of the entire Payne family as well as the members and staff of Augusta National Golf Club and his many friends in the world of golf around the globe it gives me great pleasure to applaud Billy Payne as he takes his rightful place among golf's most influential and important people.

For almost two decades I have had the privilege to know and work with an extraordinary man. Over that time we have developed a special friendship and trust for one another. His enthusiasm for life, his total commitment to excellence and his passion for our sport has been a great inspiration for me and so many others who love the game of golf and believe in its many virtues.

I'm sure Billy never expected to be on this stage tonight but he is here the only way he'd want to be, with his wife Martha and his family and with his many friends. So, ladies and gentlemen, it is my great honor to introduce my friend, the 6th chairman of Augusta National Golf Club, and now a Hall of Famer, Mr. Billy Payne.

(Applause.)

BILLY PAYNE: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And congratulations on the great job that you are doing at our club and for the game of golf. We can't wait to see what you have next up your sleeve as you continue to inspire us all with your commitment to our game.

There's so many people I need to thank tonight. It's truly difficult to know where to begin. A special shout out to my dear friends Pat Battle, Darren Devor, Cathy Cravens, who have spent countless hours planning all of these details over the last several months. And thanks to the many West Coast Augusta National members who this week have opened your hearts, your homes and most importantly your wonderful golf courses to all of us visiting for this event.

Special among them Mr. Dave Dormann, Neal Bushry, George Still, Egon Derman, Greg Johnson, Heidi Uberoff, Doug McKenzie, George Roberts and Lee Styslinger, thank you all so much. Appreciate it.

And to Brodie Warners, and the entire golf Hall of Fame staff for your kindness and understanding as we bombarded you with questions and requests over the last several months.

I'd like to begin my remarks by a special word of congratulations to all of the other inductees, indeed all of the World Golf Hall of Fame members here tonight. Every single one of you is a personal hero of mine and I am honored to share this stage with you here tonight.

But unlike all of my fellow inductees tonight who have great careers as a player or a contributor to the game of golf I know that I am the outlier here tonight. So let's be clear. It is Augusta National Golf Club that is being honored here tonight. It is the celebration of our efforts over the years to help grow this wonderful game. And I hope tonight serves as a continuing challenge for you, Chairman Ridley, and for all who will follow you, to use the considerable resources that we have, our meaningful talents, but mostly the joy us obligation that we all feel in gratitude for being a part of something as wonderful and life changing as Augusta National.

And Mr. Chairman, I should say, that if the Augusta National Women's Amateur is any indication of your continuing commitment to excellence, you're off to one hell of a start. Congratulations. (Applause.)

As for me, I know that I am here solely and singularly because I have the honor and privilege of leading an amazingly talented team of remarkable staff and loving friends. It is them, not me, who masterfully executed our recent plan to leverage the powerful brand of Augusta National and the Masters for the good and the growth of our game. The idea to do so was not mine, but all the while imbedded in our DNA as a gift -- no, not as a gift -- as a mandate, from our founders, Bobby

Jones and Clifford Roberts. Because of these great men Augusta National has always been a bright beacon of light, constantly and consistently illuminating what was good and possible in the game of golf. More recently and appropriately we all reached out to the other great golfing organizations in the world asking them to allow us to help them grow the game around the world, to assist them in their long-term efforts. And because they said yes, and because our collective efforts are beginning to significantly and positively benefit our global game because they said yes, I am here tonight receiving this honor, but humbly acknowledging that but for the USGA, The R&A, the PGA of America, the PGA Tour and the LPGA, but for all of them, I would not be here tonight. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. (Applause.)

And how do I ever adequately acknowledge and thank my friends at Augusta National? Our staff, remarkably led through the years by Jim Armstrong, now Will Jones, somehow they put up with my many obsessions, the way I would inevitably freak out before every Masters when I would see the smallest thing out of order. The way I would compliment their work and pat them on the back but at the same time tell them they could do better. Somehow they tolerated me. And because of their ability to recognize and to discard most of my bad ideas, we pushed the envelope, always trying to advance the never-ending challenge of our founders.

And the rest of our remarkable staff, so many of them here tonight, they are the heart and soul of the Masters that the world dearly loves.

My bride, Martha, of 51 years, always my anchor. Always allowing, even encouraging me to chase my dreams. Whatever successes we have achieved in life have been together, the way we will always be, now and forever. I love you, mom.

And finally, my career as chairman of Augusta National Golf Club has already given me an honor of even greater value than my induction into the World Golf Hall of Fame tonight. It has given me so many wonderful friends that I truly love, friends who followed me, even when they sometimes disagreed with me, friends who worked tirelessly because they wanted me to succeed, friends who got used to hugging me instead of shaking my hand because they knew I meant it sincerely and affectionately.

Above all, above all, my experience at Augusta National has taught me that if you truly love your friends, they will take you anywhere, anywhere you could possibly dream of going. I know this because my friends brought me here tonight.

Thank you, God bless.

(Applause.)