

BEN HOGAN'S SHORT GAME SIMPLIFIED

The Secret to Hogan's Game From 120 Yards and In

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[SP PATCH]
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{A} CHAPTER ONE: FROM RUDE BEGINNINGS



Hogan displaying the balance and power of the best ball striker in all of golf. But he did not start out that way. Far from it.

Ben Hogan didn't stand a chance for a successful life as a kid from the plateau lands of central Texas. He was born on August 13, 1912 in Stephenville Hospital across the Brazos River from Fort Worth, just ten miles north from his family's simple cottage in a cattle town named Dublin. His mother, Clara, married a Blacksmith named Chester who had health problems on top of the bad luck to be caught in the middle of a horse dominated economy, changing inexorably into an automobile economy. Depressed and impoverished, Chester could not cope with all the changes which were beyond his control, and so chose a cold and brittle St. Valentines' Day to shoot himself in front of his quiet and polite nine year old son Bennie. The noise of the thirty-eight calibre pistol aimed awkwardly at the heart in the confines of a tiny cottage, blew away for young Ben, any hope of a life which could be supported by normal amounts of trust and confidence.

It should be noted, that in contrast, Tiger Woods' father, Earl Woods, was a decorated Green Beret with two tours in Vietnam. So, as a Lieutenant Colonel, he knew the value of discipline and commitment. His goal was to transfer to his son the essential characteristics a 'good person' as well as those of 'a champion' by self examination and discovery of one's talent,

and the unwavering determination to polish it. Tiger's daily routine began with making his bed every morning then finishing his homework before any golf could be contemplated.

Earl would deliberately try to intimidate his young son while playing golf. "Water on the right, OB on the left" he would point out just before Tiger's down-swing "He would look at me with the most evil look, but he wasn't permitted to say anything."

"One day I did all my tricks, and he looked at me and just smiled 'Tiger,' I said, 'you've completed your training.' And I made him a promise. You'll never run into another person as mentally tough as you."

Things were quite different for 'Bennie', the baby of his family. He moved with his older sister Princess, and brother Royal, to Fort Worth where his mother tried to hold the stricken family together as a seamstress. Royal left school to help support the family as a delivery-boy, while his little brother, 'Bennie' sold newspapers. At eleven, Ben began caddying at Glen Garden for sixty-five cents a loop -- even though it meant a seven mile round-trip from home and back.

Never a dedicated student because of his need to earn money, Hogan dropped out of Central High School in Fort Worth in 1930 to turn professional for the Texas Open in San Antonio at age seventeen. Because of a terrible hook, he struggled ineffectively for eight frustrating and challenging years, and then forced himself by sheer will power and tenacity, to invent a swing that would not let him down -- like people including his father were capable of doing. He knew he needed something that would control the ball's direction. Something that would take the fear out of important and dangerous shots -- then after inventing 'arduous daily practice' and after experimenting daily through hours of intense and concentrated ball striking -- he honed a new swing through trial and error.

Just as important, Hogan met a young woman named Valerie Fox in a Fort Worth Sunday school, and found at last someone upon whom he could depend. He had developed a protective and distrusting personality both on and off the course. However, despite his 'demons' and down to their last few dollars on the tour again in one last desperate gamble to earn a living from the 'Gold Trail during the Great Depression, Hogan finally won eleven hundred dollars paired with Vic Ghezzi at the 1938 Four Ball Invitation in Hershey, Pennsylvania. By 1940 he had won three in row in North Carolina. The struggle appeared to have been won.

In a 1982 interview, looking back, and strangely evocative of Earl Wood's view of determination, Ben Hogan was to say:

“I feel sorry for rich kids now. I really do. Because they're never going to have the opportunity I had. Because I knew tough things. And I had a tough day all my life and I can handle tough things. They can't. And every day that I progressed was joy to me, and I recognized it every day. I don't think I could have done what I've done if I hadn't had the tough days to begin with.”

Tiger Woods, has said, “Ben Hogan was the greatest driver there ever was,” and undoubtedly recognized that Ben Hogan's toughness in competition might have matched his own . . . and wouldn't that be a battle to watch?



Here is another solid looking stance by tiger Woods, the man chasing Ben Hogan's records. The club-head is hovering for an unrestricted and controlled take-away. Steve Williams, his caddie, checks alignment.

Further, as majestic as Tiger's short game can be, a lot of golfers forget that Hogan's short game system made him an exceptional player around the greens. For example, Kevin Riley, a golf pro who still works for the Ben Hogan Company, remembers in 1955 when Mr. Hogan went to the Pro-Am for the Los Angeles Open at Inglewood Country Club. Kevin sat with Lloyd Mangrum, US Open winner in 1946, and recalls a shot Hogan made at the par-four eighteenth hole. The

final hole had an elevated green with approximately eight degrees of slope to receive the second shot. Hogan appeared to be in big trouble when his ball took a strange bounce and went over the back of the green and down a slight hill. With the gallery watching anxiously, Hogan lobbed from over back of the green to a putting surface sloping away from him. The ball took one hop next to the hole, where it bounced past the cup, then put on the brakes, and backed up the eight-degree slope to stop within two feet of the hole. Kevin had been sure the ball would roll over the front edge of the green for sure, but no, it was another spectacular shot. “That’s Hogan,” Mangrum said. “He does stuff that no one else can.”

Ben Hogan was also a great putter who played through major championships such as the Masters and PGA tournaments without a single three putt. It is worth paying attention to his instruction.

Before we look at Ben Hogan’s system for a solid short game system, let’s first check the record he earned without the benefit of Junior development programs or College leagues.

BEN HOGAN’S EARLY CAREER TOUR VICTORIES:

1938: Hershey Four Ball (with Vic Ghezzi).

1940: North and South Open; Greater Greensboro Open; Asheville Open; Hale America Open, Rochester Open.

1941: Asheville Open; Chicago Open, Hershey Open; Miami Biltmore Four Ball (with Gene Sarazen); Inverness Four Ball (with Jimmy Demaret).

1942: Los Angeles Open; San Francisco Open; North and South Open; Asheville Open; Hale America Open; Rochester Open.

1945: Nashville Invitational; Portland Open; Richmond Invitational; Montgomery Invitational; Orlando Open.

1946: Phoenix Open; San Antonio Open; St. Petersburg Open; Miami International Four Ball (with Jimmy Demaret); Colonial Invitational; Western Open; Goodall Championship; Golden State Open; Dallas Invitational; North and South Open.

1947: Los Angeles Open; Phoenix Open; Colonial invitational; Chicago Victory Open (also called the World Championship of Golf); Inverness Four Ball (with Jimmy Demaret).

1948: Los Angeles Open; PGA Championship; US Open; Inverness Four Ball (with Jimmy Demaret); Motor City Open; Reading Open; Western Open; Denver Open; Reno Open; Glendale Open.

1949: Bing Crosby Pro-Am; Long Beach Open.

Hogan and his wife Valerie, his true pal, were now on top of the world at the height of his career in 1949. He appeared to have conquered his demons after adjusting his 'caddie-swing' grip and polishing his competitive game through the relentless grind of hitting practice balls, forever his favorite pastime. He and Valerie, were now in a brand new Cadillac heading to El Paso on a misty February afternoon.

Ben drove cautiously in the fog, but fate had arranged it so he would meet a ten-ton Greyhound bus just as the twenty-seven-year-old bus driver chose to pass a truck on a two laned bridge at fifty miles per hour.

As depicted in the bio-picture, 'Follow The Sun', Hogan threw himself across Valerie to protect her. The engine came through the dashboard and smashed his left ankle, crushed his leg, and fractured his pelvis. His left eye was severely damaged when smashed by the dash board; damage which in later life, combined with aging, seriously limited his depth perception. Doctors told Valerie that he might never walk again, let alone play golf.

Hospitalized for two months, and undergoing complex and dangerous surgery, Hogan battled pain, blood clots, and depression, but still he hung on. On April 1, 1949, Valerie took Ben home – now weighing only one hundred and twenty pounds – with pain in his left shoulder and leg that he would bear for the rest of his days. Golf was out of the question . . . or was it?

Seven months after the accident, Hogan went to England as the non-playing captain of the Ryder Cup Team. Upon his return home in September, he began to hit balls again with a stiff-legged swing, and when he had developed it enough, he decided to try it out at the Los Angeles Open that winter. His weight was up to one hundred and sixty pounds (partially at least, a result of muscle mass from his rigorous rehabilitation schedule). To everyone's surprise, and in spite of the elastic bandages encasing his legs, he tied for first place -- only to lose to Sam Snead in a Monday morning play-off. The good news was that he was back in the game. For Hogan it was also a sign that, if he could tolerate the pain, he could compete on a shortened schedule of tournaments.



Hogan at Winged Foot for the US Open in 1959 hunching down to better see the ball as his depth perception diminished.

The 1950 United States Open was held in June at the Merion Golf Club in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, where Hogan hit a classic one iron to within two feet of the eighteenth green to set up the win which noted sportswriter Dan Jenkins would call “the most incredible comeback in the history of sports.”

Jack Nicklaus summarized his thoughts with this statement:

“So many things about Hogan were special. He was the greatest shot-maker I ever saw. He was more determined and could totally out-focus anyone else in his time of playing. No one seemed to know him very well, which made him that much more feared as a competitor. He probably worked harder than anyone to reach the top, and it took him a long time. Then, when he got there, his body was all but destroyed by the car accident. All he did was start over again at nearly forty, and got even better. Nobody was like Hogan.”

Hogan’s own response was, “It proved that I could still play” and he began to increase his work-load, honing his new swing which now had reduced leg action, but involved a muscular connection between the shoulders, arms, and torso that Hogan called his “Magical Device”. He also let it be known that somewhere within the confusion of his high speed swing there was a move he announced as his “Secret”. It became evident that these two components proved to be

highly effective, because Hogan put together a record of championships which took him, once again, to the top of the PGA tour.

BEN HOGAN'S POST ACCIDENT TOUR VICTORIES

1950: US Open.

1951: The Masters; US Open; World Championship of Golf.

1952: Colonial National Invitational.

1953: The Masters; Pan American Open; Colonial National Invitation; US Open; The Open Championship (at Carnoustie).

Following his post accident wins in: the 1953 Masters, the US Open, and the British Open at Carnoustie, Scotland -- Life Magazine printed an explanation of 'Hogan's Secret' in its August 8, 1955 issue.



Life magazine August 8, 1955. Ben Hogan at the top of his swing and once again on top of his game.

Readers gobbled it up. Unfortunately, Hogan's artist, the highly skilled Anthony Ravielli, may not have understood golf as well as he could sketch anatomical illustrations. Or perhaps it was Hogan himself who did not fully understand some of the terms being used. Or maybe it was because, as Tiger states, "feel is not real." Whatever the reason, there was mislabeling of some

of Hogan's actions, so that Hogan did not explain the secret correctly, and confusion reigned. Many a 'teaching-pro' will laughingly agree that Hogan had made them a lot of money as they tried to correct the damage done by the misdirection.

Hogan himself admitted: "I doubt if it will be worth a doggone to the weekend duffer, and it might ruin a bad golfer."

Mr. Hogan planned to clarify the misleading information and the several tantalizing hints he left behind. Unfortunately, before he could be persuaded to properly describe his 'Secret' and how to apply it, while using the correct anatomical terms, he passed away leaving hundreds of analysts puzzling for over fifty years. At least thirty pros put pens to paper with 'answers' ranging from: the way he positioned his feet at address, to the way he waggled his ultra stiff clubs. One pro wrote a puzzling theory: "Hogan was truthful when he emphasized the cupping of his wrist. But, as he was later to reveal to a friend, it was only part of the story. The other part was the correct functioning of his right knee. The wrist was cupped because that was the only position it could assume based on the right knee's position."

The golfing giant, Gene Sarazen, summarized the wide variety of opinions about Hogan's Secret by tapping his head with the observation that: "Hogan had it up here."

I had the temerity to describe, in universal anatomical language, what was taught to me in slang terms by Moe Norman and Stan Leonard with snippets from all the other professional golfers (George Knudson, Alvie Thompson, Jack Nicklaus, Ernie Brown, and various caddies who shared their knowledge and experiences with Hogan, for a book entitled 'Ben Hogan's Magical Device and the Secret Within'. I now present an illustrated account of Hogan's short game system, wherein his secret move at impact is well described and illustrated.



Ben Hogan in the rough at Carnoustie in 1953 British Open.