

The New Ben Hogan

By JOHN D. AMES

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The Open Championship at Merion Golf Club, near Philadelphia, was a milestone in golf, not just because it happened to be the Golden Anniversary USGA Open but for many other reasons.

First, let's talk about the Champion. While Ben Hogan was certainly the Champion at Riviera in 1948 (where he set the Open scoring record of 276), at Merion in 1950 he was a *great* Champion. This is true not only because of the comeback he made from his near-fatal auto accident, but because Ben has become a man of noticeably great character, with his gentle smile, his humbleness, his willingness to converse a little with one and all.

As for his physical recovery, Ben Hogan sincerely wants people to forget it. He wants to be regarded in exactly the same light as every other competitor. We ought to respect his wishes. Yet his comeback must be mentioned. Without it, the history is not complete. With it, there is inspiration for many people.

Quite simply, it is the story of the spirit within the man—the spirit that springs from faith.

Ben Hogan's spirit had far outrun his physical convalescence much more than a year ago. He was injured, you will recall, in February, 1949. He was then the Open Champion. He had to give up his title without lifting a club. But he did not give up the idea of defending the Championship until almost the very last moment—a few days before the tournament.

Now it can be told that Ben Hogan actually filed entry for the 1949 Open Championship in May. It was accompanied by this message:

"I am getting along great just now, up all day and walking as much as possible. The doctor tells me walking is the only cure for my legs, so that's my daily thought and effort.

"Enclosed is my entry for the Open, with the hope that I will be able to play. Up to now I haven't taken a swing, but miracles may happen. Would you please do me a favor and not release my entry? If I can play I should like it to be a surprise. I hope and pray that I may see you in June."

The USGA, of course, did not announce that entry. Now, with great reluctance, Ben says we can talk about it. He will dislike this sort of story, because he has breadth of vision enough to know that thousands of others have passed through crises in their lives, without public notice; and he does not think he is special. But this seems a pretty good time to make the record complete.

The third and last scheduled day of the Open at Merion was Hogan's first attempt at 36 holes since his injury. He was obviously tired in the afternoon round, but held himself together to gain a tie at 287 for first place with Lloyd Mangrum and George Fazio. This was seven over par for 72 holes. Pennsylvania laws, prohibiting the playing of sport for which admission might be charged on Sunday morning, gave Ben another half-day of rest, for which he must have been grateful.

Playing for Par

In the play-off, Hogan broke par by one stroke with a 69, Mangrum had 73 and Fazio 75. Hogan played a great round of marked control. He obviously played for par and let the other contenders take care of themselves. Many times he did not go directly for the pin but went to the center of the green or to a safe place where two good putts would give him par. With putting luck he might have had a phenomenal score. From tee to green his play was practically flawless.

Everyone Smiled at Merion



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 The pleasure apparently was unanimous when James D. Standish, Jr., President of the USGA, presented the Open Championship trophy to Mr. and Mrs. Ben Hogan after the play-off at the Merion Golf Club. George Fazio, who finished third, is at the extreme left, and Lloyd Mangrum, who was second, is at the right.

Hogan holds a unique position. He has won two Open Championships and the war-time Hale America Open.

This was the first time Lloyd Mangrum had been beaten in an Open play-off. Merion was much to his liking, as it is a course for accuracy and Lloyd has been generally straight off the tee and has a phenomenal touch in his chipping, putting and trap shots around the green.

It is impossible to say whether the two-stroke penalty which Mangrum drew for touching his ball while in play on the 16th green made any difference in the outcome. Mangrum had just birdied the 15th to trail Hogan by only one stroke, and parred the 16th (except for his penalty) after having played short of the quarry. Had it been his honor on the 17th tee, a par 3, the psychological aspects of the two finishing holes might have been different. However, no one knows the answer to that. In any case, Hogan holed a tremendous putt for a bird 2 on the 17th and sealed the Championship.

Mangrum won the 1946 Open at Canterbury after a double play-off with Byron Nelson and Victor Ghezzi, and he played at Merion like a champion. It seemed as if it wasn't his turn to win.

George Fazio played steadily through the four tournament rounds and had a good round in the play-off. His play this year should mark him as a top contender.

Much could be said about the great skill of the professionals and many amateurs. Their control of the golf ball, on a course where control was absolutely essential, was remarkable.

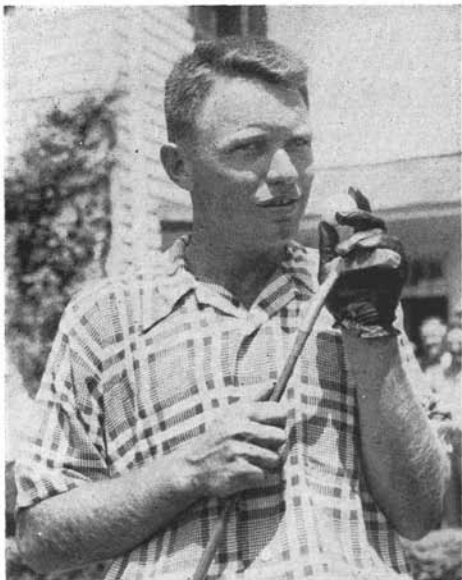
A Great Course

The Championship could not have been played on a finer test of golf, or one in better physical condition. The rough had been trimmed to a modest length 10 to 12 feet from the edge of the fairway, and from then on had been allowed to grow naturally. Twenty days of rain in May had given a strong growth to all the grass and a good pitching softness to the greens, although the surfaces for putting were extremely fast

but true. In other words, it was a course on which anyone who was having an exceptional round could score exceedingly well.

This was the case with Lee Mackey, Jr., unattached professional from Birmingham, Ala., who shot a 64, six under par, in the first round and who by this feat now holds the lowest single-round record for the Open.

Distance at Merion was not a requisite.



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Lee Mackey, Jr.

Many players used irons off some tees. Some remarkably long shots were played, however. Sam Snead reached the fourth green with a spoon second—a hole measuring 595 yards with a brook immediately in front of the green. Bill Nary reached the center of the second green with two shots—it is a 555-yard hole, much of it uphill.

But the course took its toll, particularly on Saturday afternoon. Mangrum, Dutch Harrison, Johnny Palmer, Cary Middlecoff, the defending Champion, and two or three others all had a good chance of doing better than 287. For some reason or other, the first-nine-holes scores

in the afternoon for these players were around 40 and 41 rather than nearer the par 36. Mangrum himself scored 76 when anything less over the par-70 course would have won the tournament.

Hogan's estimate was this: "I've never before played a course where you are so constantly on the defensive. There's never a chance to take the offensive."

Speed of Play

For Saturday's 36 holes it was determined that play by 2s would be faster and easier on the players than by 3s. It definitely worked out that way. The average time per couple, both morning and afternoon, was approximately 3 hours 25 minutes. Considering the delays caused by the need for gallery control, play proceeded very smoothly, especially on the "tight" Merion course. The fastest Saturday round was 2 hours 50 minutes, and a number of early starters were under three hours, before the galleries grew to great size—perhaps as great as ever saw the Open.

Thus, on Saturday, play by couples required the average player to be on the course less than seven hours for the two rounds, whereas play by 3s sometimes has taken between eight and nine hours.

The Sunday play-off, with three competitors, required 4 hours 40 minutes, but this needs to be analyzed. The play must have been delayed by the gallery nearly 1 hour 30 minutes all told, since with the tremendous flow of people back and forth across the fairways it took nearly five minutes to a hole before the gallery was in position to allow play to proceed.

Prize money for professionals was increased on the eve of the Championship, as follows: first, \$4,000, instead of \$2,000; second, raised from \$1,500 to \$2,500; and every player who returned a 72-hole score beyond 30th pro place received \$100. Thus, instead of a \$10,000 total as originally planned, the final awards amounted to \$14,900. The increases applied to the Golden Anniversary Open only.