

Hogan's Crowning Glory

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It was appropriate that Ben Hogan should win the British Open Championship at Carnoustie in Coronation year for he is to all golfers, in the words of the crowning service, "your undoubted King".

We in Britain had been prepared to do him honor and give him allegiance, for his record in the United States was known and admired, but we insisted that he must prove himself under our conditions before he could properly be regarded as King of the Links.

Well, he submitted his great reputation to the test and all the world of golf knows how signally he triumphed. Not only did he win, and at the first time of asking, but he won handsomely on what is the most severe golfing test in our islands in weather which was exacting though it lacked what Carnoustie folk prayed for—the ultimate hazard of a strong East wind.

In truth, the course was at its easiest on the final day, but no one having seen Hogan in action was prepared to argue that he would not have won just as convincingly in any weather. He might not have finished with a record 63, but equally, if his putts had dropped, he might have done almost anything. In short, he gave one of the most impressive displays of golf ever seen in Britain and, what was equally pleasing to a critical Scottish crowd of many thousands, he comported himself from first to last with dignity and modesty.

He was respected before he came, he won admiration during his visit, and he took back with him to his own country as much of our affection as ever we gave to Bob Jones and Charlie Yates. If ever he should return he will have the freedom of our hearts as well as of our courses.

From the beginning it was Hogan's championship. His first hole in the qualifying round was a portent. He hit a long, straight drive, a firm approach to within a few feet of the flag, and holed the putt without fuss or fear. His 70 on the Burn-

side course was followed by a 75 on the championship circuit, a rather spotty 75, too, in that he took 41 to go out for no real reason except that he found the greens too slow for his liking and could not get the ball up to the hole.

In the championship proper he played beautifully, making fewer errors than any other competitor except on the greens, where he was safe rather than brilliant. For the record, he did 73, 71, 70 and 63 on a course 7,200 yards long with a strict par of 70, and he gave at least one observer the feeling that if the tournament had lasted a day longer he would have scored in the middle or even low 60's. As the old caddie said, "it's no' possible, but it's a fact"—and the fact was that he hit the ball straighter from tee to green than anyone else.

His driving in particular was glorious—always straight and, when the hole demanded it, very long indeed. He made an occasional error, usually of judgment of distance, through the green, and once, at the seventeenth hole in the third round, he cut a spoon shot into a bunker and then took three putts for his only 6 of the championship; but these were minor lapses compared with his major virtues of keeping the ball in play and avoiding destructive shots.

He will, I am sure, despite his many experiences of marching to triumph, not easily forget the final scene of all. The last fairway was lined along its 450 yards with spectators seven to ten deep. The championship was in Hogan's pocket, for he needed a 4 for his 63 and an aggregate of 232 and the best that had been done, or was likely to be done, was 236 by Dai Rees, Peter Thomson, Frank Stranahan, and (later) Antonio Cerda.

Hogan's drive was perfect, his iron was true to the heart of the green, some 20 feet from the flag. Everyone was praying that he would finish with a grand flourish, but then he wobbled slightly and his

Broadway Becomes "Hogan's Alley"



Wide World Photo

The City of New York pulled all the stops in welcoming Ben Hogan after he had completed his "slam" by adding the British Open to the USGA Open which he won in June. He was driven up Broadway in showers of ticker tape, received the greetings of the Mayor, was honored at a luncheon, presented the ball he used on the last hole at Carnoustie to "Golf House" and later was honored again at a dinner by the USGA.

putt was the kind of nervous poke that any golfer may hit under stress. The ball finished at least 30 inches short and for a moment there was the horrid fear of anti-climax. But the great man took a grip of himself and holed the short one crisply, and there burst upon his now bared head such a roar of warm congratulation as was at once a tribute to him and a proof of British generosity of spirit.

I make no apology for dealing with the championship as though it had been a one-man affair. In the end it was, but for a time it was not. Stranahan led after one round with a 70, with Eric Brown at his heels and then an international

cluster at 72—Rees, Thomson, Locke and de Vincenzo, with Hogan and former champion Fred Daly at 73. After two rounds Brown and Rees were leading at 142, with de Vincenzo a stroke behind and Hogan, Stranahan and Thomson at 144. After three rounds Hogan had moved up to equal first with de Vincenzo, with Rees, Thomson and Cerda a stroke behind at 215, but although all the leaders played very well in the fourth round and no one cracked, only Hogan was able to increase the pressure and he finished in splendid isolation four strokes ahead to take his place in golfing history alongside Vardon, Hagen, Sarazen and R. T. Jones.