

# The Real Snead Story

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You probably know Samuel Jackson Snead as the world's most naturally talented striker of golf balls. Like golfers everywhere, you have doubtless marveled at his rhythmic swing and flowing power, as universal standards of golfing perfection. But you may not know much about Sam himself. I welcome this chance to tell you something of the Snead that you do not read about or see at the golf tournaments.

Sam is gifted with a beautiful physical coordination that is no less amazing than are his supple strength and his trigger-quick mental and physical reflexes. Accordingly, golf is just one of the sports at which he has excelled. As a high school star in football, baseball, basketball, track and boxing, he was the prototype all-around athlete.

Many observers have commented on Sam's strong and flexible back, shoulder and arm muscles. Actually, of even more importance to his unrelenting golfing prowess through the years have been the relaxed strength and bounce of his athletic legs.

Proof of Sam's participation in many sports can also be seen in his strong fingers and hands, of which various bones have been broken. These repaired bones combine with his unique double-jointedness to make an impossible task for any one who would try to emulate exactly the appearance of Sam's golf grip. Incidentally, his peculiar hand conformation has misled many students of golf, who have failed to reconcile his open clubface at top of backswing with the apparent straightness of the back of his left hand at maximum wrist-cock.

Surely you have in your mind's eye an accurate picture of Sam's smooth power-in-motion swing. Just a word here will suffice: I suppose that no other



Sam Snead

golfer has ever combined such an upright plane of arc with such width of arc at the point of impact. His full pivot, long arms, loose shoulders and high hands at top backswing provide a tremendous leverage of power, whereas his clubhead describes through the impact area a path that is as horizontal to the ground as is possible unless the hips were to sway through the ball.

I regard this wide-arc-at-impact feature as the one basic common mechanical denominator among all the really top golfers. In Sam's extreme case, it probably explains why he can consistently hit "soft" iron shots that seem to drop lazily on the green, with little forward force, yet with sharp backspin.

### Snead's Best Advice

The other basic prerequisite is likewise in Sam's favor: an unfailing sense of timing. Characteristically, he does not

*Reprinted from Royal Canadian Golf Association's Annual Golf Review, 1953.*

care about the numerical weight or swing-balance specifications of his clubs, relying rather on his own "feel" in choosing his equipment (witness his battered 15-year-old "irreplaceable" driver!).

He is blessed with an uncanny sense of balance and timing, the two points I have heard him emphasize most often. He once cautioned me about a fast backswing on a long-driving hole with this revealing gem of golfing wisdom: "If you want to hit a nail especially hard with a hammer, you don't jerk it back and slash at it. Rather, you draw it far back nice and slow, gather your power and, with careful aim, let 'er rip. Now, why not drive a golf ball that way?"

Sam is a true child of nature, reveling in the environment of forests, mountains and streams, and possessing an unbelievable affinity toward wild life.

He is a true "ridgerunner," preferably with a pack of dogs at his heels. He seems to have a sixth sense concerning the whereabouts and instincts of animals which, together with his marksmanship, explain his reputation through the mountains as an expert hunter and fisherman.

The local lore about his prowess at field and stream approaches the legendary. Certainly golf could not at all compete with these other out-of-door sports for Sam's preference and abiding vocational interest if fortunes could be amassed in mountain streams or deep forests.

#### When Sam Plays Best

This proclivity towards nature, this quality of naturalness, explains why Sam has reduced his tournament schedule in recent years. Of course the income-tax laws have not been without effect in this direction, but essentially it has just been a case of his allergy to the commercial aspects of tournament golf. True, he plays golf as a business, but in the process he is not immune to office nerves, which are soon frayed by the unnatural pressures of crowds, noise, travel, hotels and even competition for the dollar. He has learned at such times to get back to his natural habitat in the hills, where the tensions

are eased and he becomes once more his relaxed self.

A week or two thus "off the circuit," and he is ready to rejoin the fray. You will note that it is after these returns to the hills that Sam plays his best tournament golf, because he is then doing his best thinking.

When Sam does win his first Open, as he surely someday must, and thereby completes his great record, someone will do the Snead Story for the movies or for a book. If proper research is done, people will think the resulting story can only be fiction.

They will learn things they never knew about Sam: for example, that Sam's older brothers before him had the same Snead swing and hit the ball prodigious distances (especially the mighty Homer) when Sam was still knocking acorns about with hickory branches.

They will learn that, before turning to golf, Sam worked in a restaurant and still is a good cook, that he played the trumpet in a dance band, that his ambition was to be a clothes tailor, at which work he had some amusing and short experience, that he has a good singing voice and claims that his golf timing would be better if he could play golf to musical accompaniment, that he has a tremendous sense of fun and is a most amusing raconteur of droll stories which could earn him a fancy living on the banquet circuit should he ever tire of golfing, that he has a remarkable memory for events, places and competitive situations, that he is careful to stay physically trim, to sleep long, to eat properly and never to smoke or drink, that he has consistently exercised a keen yet cautious financial acumen in saving money and choosing wise investments, so that he is already truly a West Virginia capitalist whose considerable wealth includes a healthy balance of bonds, annuities and good farmlands, even though Jimmy Demaret still insists that Sam's backyard is buried deep with tomato cans filled with cash.

Ever since, at the age of 15, I tagged

## ANALYZING THE SECRET OF GOLF



Robert T. Jones, Jr., and Horton Smith, President of the PGA, chat in an introductory scene from the new 30-minute instructional film, "Keep 'Em in the Fairway," which was premiered in Augusta, Ga., during the Masters Tournament. The film was produced by Dallas Jones Productions for PGA and Life magazine and also features Ben Hogan, Sam Snead, Lloyd Mangrum, Jerry Barber, Cary Middlecoff, Walter Burkemo, Ed Oliver, Jimmy Demaret, Lawson Little, Byron Nelson, Lew Worsham, Pat Abbott, Miss Louise Suggs, Bing Crosby and Bob Hope. It sets forth the five fundamentals which the PGA believes to be present in every good golf swing and is being distributed in connection with National Golf Day (June 5).

along as Sam's partner when he won our state pro-amateur title, I have studied him closely and come to know him well. I am convinced that if he knew in his heart how great a golfer he really is, thanks to doing what comes naturally, the rest of the field would have no choice but to scramble for second-place money. Despite this basic humility and occasional lack of confidence, Sam has put together an amazing record. At 41 years of age, after 17 years of major competition, he is still going strong; and he will still be

winning tournaments, or at least be the sentimental favorite, when most of the younger stars of today are retired to their rocking chairs.

Beyond and above his golf, in which sport he must be recognized as truly a phenomenon, Sam is a fine gentleman and a wonderful friend, always his delightful, unspoiled, impulsive self. Just as his native golfing genius has remained essentially unchanged through the years, so has his sound character and appealing personality.