

A NEW CHAMPION AND NEW INSPIRATION

by

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THE MAIN object of the Open Championship is, of course, to determine the Open Champion, but there are by-products of importance. One is the sheer inspiration to golfers which flows from the Championship.

In this sense, the 1955 Open Championship was unusually meaningful. It thrilled and uplifted millions of sports-loving people throughout the country, as well as the thousands who saw it played over the superb Lake Course of the Olympic Country Club, in San Francisco.

Inspiration from persons comes in many forms.

There is, for example, the wonderful pattern set by Ben Hogan, not only in his playing but in his personal dignity and humility. Although he is so far above the crowd that few can hope to match his skill he has fired the imagination of countless people—by his golf, his personality, his determination and his faith after his near-fatal automobile accident in 1949.

Ben inspired Jack Fleck. After defeating Ben in the Open playoff, Jack said: "I have idolized Ben since my caddie days." He used the new Ben Hogan-made clubs to defeat their maker!

Jack Fleck himself now has given inspiration, if of a somewhat different sort. The example of the new Open Champion has infused fresh hope into untold numbers of people. If a hitherto little-known professional from a municipal course in Davenport, Iowa, can tie Ben Hogan and then outscore him in a playoff, surely there is a way for almost anybody to do almost any good thing.

The meaning of such things as open

golf championships can run deep. The meaning can be an uplift of spirit for people by giving a renewed glimpse of visions they may have long held but allowed to grow dim; a fresh stirring of powers within.

Yes, if Jack Fleck can beat Ben Hogan, anything is possible in this best of all possible worlds.

Champions, then, are sometimes crowned not so much to satisfy their own desire for success as for the good of their fellows. When they are receptive to it, they can be used in the Big Plan to help life move upward a little bit. Ben Hogan was used in that way. It looks as if Jack Fleck is, too, and that he is aware of it. When he accepted his Open Championship prizes, his most heartfelt remark seemed to be this:

"I thank God for giving me the power to play."

How Good is Fleck?

How good a player is 32-year-old Jack Fleck? He was little known before this year's Open. Twice before he had played in the Open. At Merion Golf Club in 1950 he failed to qualify for the last 36 holes. At Oakmont Country Club in 1953 he scored 76-76-77-80—309, tied for 52nd place and won \$150. This was 26 strokes more than the winner, Ben Hogan.

This year he had played in many tournaments on the professional circuit, and at the Olympic Country Club everything jelled. It was a complete test of his courage as well as his skill and his physical condition (he neither smokes nor drinks).

How good is Jack Fleck? Let's see what he did, round by round:

CONGRATULATIONS!



San Francisco Chronicle Photo

With the sinking of the final putt in the play-off, Ben Hogan (left) quickly steps forward to congratulate Jack Fleck, the new Open Champion.

First round—76, nine strokes off the pace.

Second round—69, for a 36-hole total of 145, one stroke off the pace.

Third round—75, for a 54-hole total of 220, three strokes off the pace; and by now Ben Hogan had assumed the lead for the first time.

Fourth round—67, for a 72-hole total of 287 to tie Hogan.

Ben had closed with his finest round of the tournament, a sterling 70, and he was leading the field by five shots. In his first three rounds he had scored 72, 73 and 72.

With four holes left to play, Fleck knew he needed two birdies and two pars to tie Ben. Fleck made those two birdies and two pars, starting with a 2 at 15. The

actual tie came about on the home hole, where he downed a 7-foot putt for a birdie 3.

How good is Jack Fleck? In the 18-hole playoff the next day, he never trailed. He took the lead with a par 4 at the fifth when Ben had to play a safety second shot after his tee shot wound up in the rough.

At the eighth Jack saw Ben hole a 50-footer for a birdie 2 that might have squared the contest. But Fleck had played a splendid shot to the green, and his eight-foot putt rolled into the cup to keep him a stroke ahead.

That was the first of three straight birdies for Jack. The 2 at the eighth was followed by 3s at the ninth and the tenth,

each the product of a 25-foot putt, and all of a sudden Jack Fleck led Ben Hogan by three strokes, with eight holes to play.

Ben whittled it down to 1 stroke with one hole left. He hit a superb brassie shot to the seventeenth green, which Fleck could not reach with his No. 3 wood.

With more than 8,000 persons watching, they went to the home hole. Would Hogan tie Fleck here, as Fleck had tied Hogan the day before?

Hogan drove. His ball started off line to the left, and you thought he might be fading it generously into the fairway. But it flew straight into the rough. His foot had slipped on the tee. He had hit the ball in the heel of the club, and now he was 35 or 40 feet off the fairway, in an impossible lie in the heaviest rough, the grass being fully a foot high there. There were three degrees of rough, and this was the worst, being so far off the fairway.

It was pathetic to watch the brave little Texan slam at the grass three times before the ball came out onto the fairway. But he played out his string, pitching onto the green and holing a 30-foot putt for a 6 on a par-4 hole measuring 337 yards.

Fleck's closing par gave him 69 for the round, to Hogan's 72, against a stiff par of 70.

Thus, three of Jack Fleck's last four rounds were in the sixties—69, 67, 69. All the other 161 players in the field produced only four rounds below par. Fleck was a wonderful putter on the mildly contoured Olympic greens.

Aside from his playing skill, Jack Fleck is a most self-composed young man. He never once appeared flustered in the play-off. He played deliberately, with intense concentration. Olympic's General Chairman, Robert A. Roos, Jr., remarked during the play-off, "He's in another world. You could stick a six-inch needle in his back and he'd never know the difference."

THE PLAY-OFF

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OUT				
Hole	Yards	Par	Fleck	Hogan
1	530	5	5	5
2	423	4	4	4
3	220	3	3	3
4	433	4	4	4
5	457	4	4	5
6	437	4	4	4
7	266	4	4	4
8	139	3	2	2
9	420	4	3	4
Out	3,325	35	33	35
IN				
10	417	4	3	4
11	429	4	5	4
12	387	4	4	5
13	187	3	3	3
14	410	4	4	3
15	144	3	3	3
16	603	5	5	5
17	461	4	5	4
18	337	4	4	6
In	3,375	35	36	37
Total	6,700	70	69	72

How good is Jack Fleck? Without troubling about the future, let's just say that at Olympic he was good enough to win from the greatest player of the generation.

"Unknown"? Who wasn't unknown at one time? Herb Wind in his report for SPORTS ILLUSTRATED put it very well: "Perhaps all of us who saw this play-off can appreciate a bit better now how it felt to be at Brookline in 1913 when another complete unknown—the name was something like Ouimet—defeated the peerless Harry Vardon and that other contemporary giant, Ted Ray, in that historic Open play-off. This, too, some 42 years later, was quite an afternoon, and the new champion, Jack Fleck, revealed himself to be quite a golfer."

Opportunity for the Flecks

It is fascinating to see a new star rise, and it has happened countless times in the Open. One thing that makes it possible is the liberal entry requirements—one has to be a professional or an amateur with a

handicap not over 3. Through sectional qualifying, each entrant has convenient opportunity to try out. He determines his place for himself. How many young pros have envisioned four "dream rounds" in the Open?

With only 162 starting places available and an entry nearly ten times that size (1,525) this year, the USGA must restrict the number of exemptions from sectional qualifying. This year there were fewer exemptions than ever before—only 16, compared with 30 a year ago. Of the former Champions, only the last five individuals to win are now granted exemptions. This means that some of the fine players of the past no longer have a free ride.

But it also means that there are more places in sectional qualifying for fellows like Jack Fleck. The Championship is a test of *current* ability.

It still is possible for stars of other days to qualify—Bobby Cruickshank, at 58, scored 70-70 in the Pittsburgh rounds and was at Olympic. He qualified on current skill, not nostalgic sentiment.

These are some of the elements that make the Open unique.

Hogan's Plans

Ben Hogan will be 43 next month. Seven years ago at Riviera, in Los Angeles, he won his first Open and set the all-time record of 276. He won again at Merion in 1950, Oakland Hills in 1951 and Oakmont in 1953. Only he, Bob Jones and Willie Anderson have won the Open four times each.

Ben thought he had achieved his desire to win a fifth time at Olympic, until Jack Fleck birdied two of the last four holes and then won the play-off.

When it was all over, Ben said he was finished with competition. "It's too hard for me to train," he told the spectators at the prize-giving. "I've worked since March for this Championship."

When he sat down, the prolonged applause—it lasted several minutes—was

A GRAVE SHORTCOMING

One of the saddest cases we have ever heard of is that of the caddie who could do his work all right but got the sack because he couldn't learn to turn his face away quickly enough before he laughed.

golfdom's tribute and farewell to a great character.

Has Hogan really retired from competition? There is no reason to doubt it. He was physically fatigued at Olympic; his left knee was bothering him a good deal. He has a new interest in his golf club manufacturing business.

But it is perfectly true that Ben Hogan is still the finest golf player alive. If he is willing to keep his game up, and if the ball rolls right, it is still possible for him to win a fifth Open.

Now, however, he says he has retired. One can only respect his decision, and salute him and thank him for all that he has meant to golf. He has enriched more lives than he will ever know about. Golf is profoundly grateful.

Gallery Control

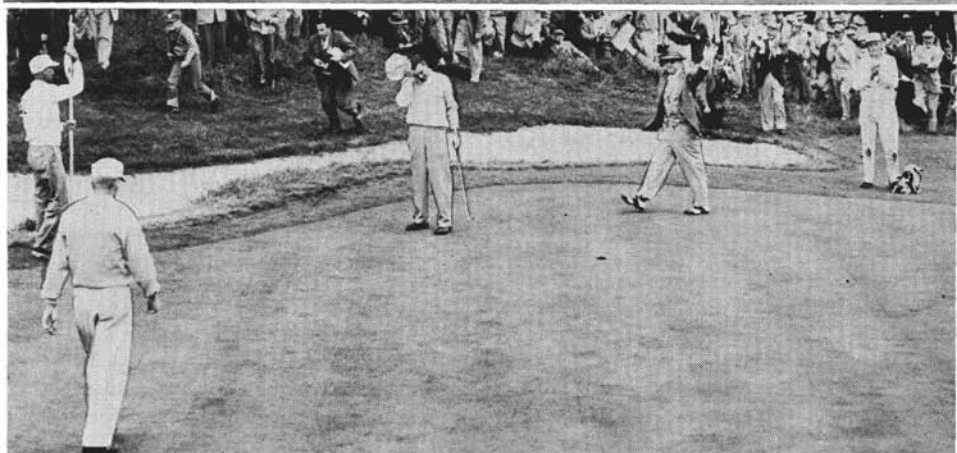
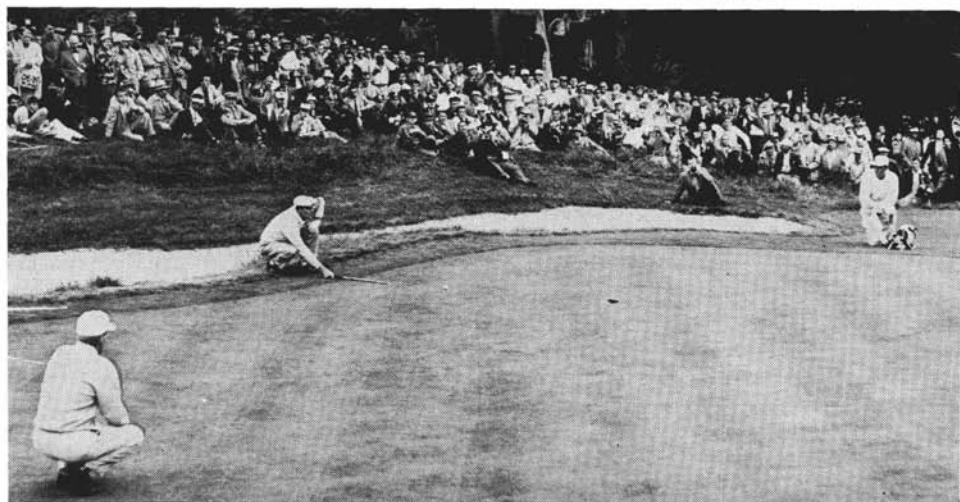
This was the Second Open for which every hole was completely roped off, so that spectators kept off playing areas except for brief cross-overs of fairways at established points. The system worked better than ever. The marshalling was perfection in the Championship proper. In the playoff, with only two players competing, some of the gallery naturally wanted to follow down the fairway and this created some difficulty, but by former standards the marshalling was good.

The USGA now owns some twelve miles of rope and 2,250 metal stakes, which are circulated among clubs holding USGA Championships attracting large galleries.

The permanent roping of every hole has many advantages, among which are:

1. The playing qualities of the course are preserved practically intact throughout

THE PUTT THAT TIED BEN HOGAN



San Francisco Chronicle Photos