

# Meeting the Master

## A Dream Comes True

He was a high-strung hotshot on the Memphis State University golf team. As tournament officials ushered him toward the Tour players' locker room, John Schlee's heart was pounding with a single thought: "I'm finally going to meet my all-time hero, Ben Hogan!" Hogan didn't play in many tournaments these days, but he was using the Memphis Invitational as a warm-up for the 1960 U.S. Open at Cherry Hills.

John's eyes darted everywhere as he strode through the corridors leading to the inner sanctum reserved exclusively for the best golfers in the world. He had never been on the inside before and didn't know what to expect. He was still reeling with awe and trepidation since he'd been told he might get this chance of a lifetime to shake hands with the legendary Ben Hogan. John's dream was to become a professional golfer, and in his young mind he believed he was about to touch the Holy Grail.

As the group approached the locker room, John picked up the acrid scent of stale cigar and cigarette smoke wafting through the humid air. His senses reveled in the complex aroma of seasoned leather, polished brass on oiled hardwood, and two kinds of sweat: one from physical exertion and the other, more acidic kind that drips from nerve endings. All melded into a rarefied atmosphere infused with victory celebrations and agonies endured by the idols of John's passion. This indeed was another world—a world he vowed he would belong to someday.

They turned a corner and there he was, cigarette lightly dangling from the left corner of his mouth. Hogan stood surrounded by reporters as he patiently parried another intrusion from the national news media. He had just posted a third-round 73 and wasn't in the best of moods.

Hogan looked more weathered and a bit shorter than John had imagined, yet the charismatic power emanating from his hero kept John standing at attention as he waited his turn. The media interview concluded a few moments later, and the official ushered John forward into Hogan's presence. Their meeting was brief, lasting barely a minute. As soon as they were introduced and shook hands, John blurted out, "I would love to learn how to play golf from you someday!"

Their eyes locked, and the room instantly fell silent. John could feel the intensity of Hogan's gaze boring straight through his eyeballs. Everyone knew that Hogan hated to give lessons.

Before Hogan had a chance to reply to this impertinent outburst, John's official escort grabbed his arm and whisked him away. The official cast an apologetic glance toward Hogan as they marched out the doorway.

John launched his professional career by earning medalist honors in the PGA Tour's first Qualifying School in the fall of 1965. He won by three strokes with an eight-round total of 583. Although he didn't win during his first year on Tour, John established himself as the new kid on the block with a run of strong showings. He finished forty-seventh on the money list and was picked as *Golf Digest's* Rookie of the Year in 1966.

Within three years, however, his game had disintegrated in a cloud of endless tinkering and swing-tip tangents. As happens to so many who find early success, John's new confidence had spurred him on to find even greater attainment, but he was soon overwhelmed by a constant patter of free advice that cluttered his mind and left his golf swing in shambles.

Where John's plate had once been full, he was now starving to learn the truth about the golf swing, something real that would work all the time. He knew that Hogan had discovered and consistently demonstrated the keys to a pure, reliable golf swing. John pined to be his student. But how? You didn't just walk up to this legend the British labeled the "Wee Ice Mon" and ask him to save your golfing life. Yet as fate would have it, John got his chance when he needed it most.

The first time John and Hogan played golf together wasn't in a tournament or even a practice round; rather, it was a serendipitous meeting where they played eleven holes at Preston Trails in Dallas. John said it was a magical day that he would treasure for the rest of his life. Thus began the realization of his lifelong dream: to walk side by side with the master who would initiate him into a profound new understanding of the golf swing that few others would ever know.

John recalled that meeting in a story I heard a number of times in his Maximum Golf School classroom:

“One day at Preston Trails in Dallas during the spring of 1969, I was practicing at the far end of the range by myself, and along comes this golf cart. As it passes by, I notice it’s Ben Hogan. I hadn’t seen him since my college days at Memphis State when I made a fool of myself after being introduced to him. He drove down to the other end of the range and started hitting balls. Immediately I panicked, trying to look my best and be professional, but I was scattering golf balls everywhere.

“After what seemed like twenty minutes, he drove his cart back toward me, stopped, and said, ‘John, would you like to play?’ I didn’t think he would even remember my name, let alone invite me to join him. I couldn’t put my clubs in his cart fast enough.

“We drove over to the first hole, grabbed our drivers, and proceeded to the tee box. He turned to me and wanted to know if we should wager a little something. I started digging in my pockets to see if I had any money to lose, and I found \$22. Ben said that would do.

“Ben teed his ball and ripped it down the right-center of the fairway about 275 yards. I got up and hooked my drive into the thick rough about 265 yards out. After we finished the first hole, we both had pars, one miraculous and one routine. I dropped a 65-foot downhill double-breaker that found the center of the cup, while Ben two-putted from 9 feet. He didn’t say a word.

“Actually, he didn’t say a word until we finished the fifth hole. At that point, I was one under, having used only five putts in five holes. I was making them from everywhere. Ben was one over with eleven putts. On the fifth, I holed a par putt from about 45 feet, and Ben three-putted from less than 15. He snatched his ball out of the cup and exploded.

“He glared at me and said I was ruining everything he had

worked his whole life to create. He told me that I was confused and had no idea how to swing a golf club—all I could do was putt. He was absolutely right, but I had just made a par to go two up on this legendary figure, and I couldn't resist a comment after his rant.

“Does this mean you don't want to press?” I heard myself saying. I could almost see the steam escaping from his ears.

“He looked at me for a few seconds, then smiled and slowly shook his head. I knew he was thinking, ‘What am I going to do with this weirdo?’ But he sensed my passion for the game and knew I truly wanted to learn how to hit a golf ball properly. So, over the next few holes, we continued what was to become my eye-opening journey into Ben Hogan's world of golf.

“Oh, yes—Hogan didn't press, and I was still two-up when we stopped playing after the eleventh hole. He never offered to pay me the \$22 bet, and I was so star-struck playing golf with him that I forgot all about it.”

## The Teacher and the Student

In the fall of 1969, John and Ben started getting together at Shady Oaks Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas. They met on a regular basis over the next five years, usually there on Hogan's home turf.

In those days, John was still playing on the Tour and traveling out of his home base in Brownsville. He was on the road for two or three weeks at a time, then often dropped by Shaky Oaks with a handful of notes he'd written on stationery from various motels. John was meticulous in tracking his swing performance and the results of each golf shot. After each tournament round,

he went back to his motel room and jotted down a list of things he wanted to go over with Hogan.

At first, John focused mainly on remedying his weak points, and by 1969, there were many. He soon found, however, that Hogan was not that concerned with solving “swing problems.” Hogan’s sole interest was in creating and maintaining an effective, repeatable golf swing. Thus, they would simply abandon the techniques and thought patterns governing John’s current swing and build a completely new one from scratch.

During one of their first meetings, Hogan went into detail about establishing a proper grip with both hands set in a “weak” position (left thumb on top of shaft, palms facing). John said that the first time he tried this new grip was a disaster. He hit a driver, and the ball sailed 270 yards dead right, over homes walled with plate-glass windows. Hogan did everything he could not to burst out laughing.

The so-called weak grip was a novelty even in 1969. Many touring professionals back in the fifties and sixties, including John, were “handsy” players. They used a strong left-hand grip, slid their bodies into the impact area, hit against a firm left side, and squared up the clubface by flipping their hands at the last possible second. If they flipped them too early, they would hook the shot. If they flipped too late, they would slice or push it right.

Because of the hand position Hogan prescribed for the grip, John said he couldn’t manipulate his hands to close the clubface on the downswing. He would have to change everything now, and this strange new grip was only the beginning.

Hogan wanted John to train the bigger muscles of his body to do the work that his hands had been assigned all along. The hips and the torso must turn around the spine, like a swinging door fixed on its hinges, and power the movement of arms and

hands through the ball. When the bigger muscles learn their assignment and the hands become more passive, Hogan said, the swing will become stronger and far more reliable. Before Hogan's time, these movements were virtually unheard of and were considered revolutionary by the few who were aware of them.

As strange as it was for John during the early days of his transformation, he couldn't argue with the validity of Hogan's seemingly radical approach. The career said it all: 9 major championships and 54 other wins, with 241 top-ten finishes in the 292 tournaments he had entered. Along the way, Hogan had invented the modern golf swing, but it remained foreign and unattainable by most players at the time.

Under Hogan's guidance, John eagerly embarked on an intense program that completely replaced his former golf swing. He studied and practiced the dynamics of Hogan's "chain action" and the laws of cause and effect that govern the swing. He learned a sequence of specific movements designed to bring the clubhead through the ball with consistent power and accuracy.

Hogan began by fine-tuning John's grip, then showed him a strong setup that John would later adapt and call the "impact address position." John learned how to create a powerful coil by turning his hands, arms, and shoulders around a stationary right knee. They worked on turning John's elbows inward at address and keeping them low and close to the torso throughout the swing. Now, instead of getting handsy, John had to learn to let his hands remain passive and follow his arms as his upper body uncoiled through the ball.

Hogan often reminded John that whether you have a chance to shoot your career best or win the U.S. Open, you must possess

a sound swing that will continue to perform under pressure. "That's the swing we're working on here," Hogan said.

Along with their workouts on the practice tee and out on the course, Hogan and John spent many hours talking in the grill-room at Shady Oaks. During one of those early sessions, Hogan asked John about his golfing goals. "I want to win five U.S. Opens and finish in the top ten money winners of all time," John replied.

"That's very admirable, John," Hogan said, "but let's see if we can get you ready to make the cut at the L.A. Open next week." (Still in transition from his old swing, John faltered and missed the cut.)

Hogan also instructed John on developing a strong imagination to help manage his game. The game of golf is *played* with one main thought, Hogan said. Visualize the shot you want and "see" it flying toward your target. Once you have practiced and prepared yourself, he continued, go out and enjoy dreaming the ball around the golf course.

John and Hogan usually played only a few holes during each session but always with a specific purpose, whether it was mental for scoring or physical for swing development. During classes at his Maximum Golf Schools, John related the following incident many times.

On one occasion, Hogan was getting ready to hit his ball, and he called John over from the golf cart.

"See this shot I have? This is the most important shot of my life," Hogan told him, pausing momentarily to flick his cigarette to the ground. "This is the only one I have any control over right now. All the swings of the past are just that, the past. All the shots I'll be hitting in the future are irrelevant right now. So, because golf is played in the present, this one shot, right now, is



the most important one to me. I will use everything in my power to execute this shot to the best of my ability.”

John said it was an amazing moment. The flag was about 145 yards away, and Hogan had an 8-iron in his hands. He set up and hit the shot pure. They tracked the ball’s flight and watched as it lipped out and stopped inches from the cup. Hogan smiled and gave John a knowing wink as he strolled back to the cart.

During the early seventies, Hogan continued to share a treasure of insights and techniques with John while they played and talked golf. These tips were given with the understanding that everything that passed between them would be kept in strict confidence. Even during Hogan’s retirement from tournament golf, he was still digging in the dirt, and he had no intention of casting his hard-earned pearls into the public arena except on his own terms and with just compensation. These sessions with John were private business, privy to the very few whom Hogan accepted into his inner circle.

Hogan advised John to use this knowledge as raw material to develop and refine his own golf game. John was free to talk about some of their experiences, but during Hogan’s lifetime John must never publicly divulge the secrets he was being taught.

When John started his Maximum Golf Schools in 1979, he followed these instructions and adapted Hogan’s key ideas into his own teaching program, giving full credit to his teacher. In 1986, he produced a book and a video titled *Maximum Golf*, the only published instructional system based solely on personal experience with Hogan. True to John’s commitment, his book withheld confidential information, including the insights Hogan had dug up *after* his own book, *Five Lessons: The Modern Fundamentals of Golf*, came out in 1957.

John gave me the task of making sure that the revelations he had kept under cover would be chronicled for posterity, along with some of his other experiences with Hogan. I have done that in this book. From the beginning, I have validated these teachings time after time in my own game and with countless students. We are living proof that Hogan's magic can be learned and applied successfully by any dedicated golfer of average talent.

## The Master's Tricks of the Trade

As John continued receiving his instruction at the feet of the master, he also learned certain subtle aspects of Hogan's techniques, along with intriguing new ways to see and play the game. John often called them Hogan's "tricks of the trade." These fascinating gems reveal the range of Hogan's imagination and his determination to perfect his game, which continued until his final breath.

### *Don't Look Back*

On one occasion after Hogan hit a less-than-perfect shot, he momentarily furrowed his brow in a sign of displeasure. When he regained composure, he told John of an important technique he'd developed to deal with disappointment. Hogan described how he walked the golf course imagining an enormous impenetrable wall following right behind him. This wall extended to either side as far as the eye could see and from the earth up into the heavens. The wall moved with his every step and blocked his view of everything that had occurred before the present moment.

Once the shot is played, it becomes history, never to be changed, Ben told John. So why look back? The lesson should already be absorbed and be a part of you. History is useful only until you grasp what it has to teach you. Let the teacher, the experience, fade away after it accomplishes its purpose.

When you make a mistake, Hogan said, quickly accept it as your instruction and then move on. Concentrate all of your attention on the next opportunity to make a terrific shot.

### *Looking Back at the Future*

“If you want to see the proper landing areas for the par fours and the par fives, Ben said you must walk the course backward,” John recalled. “That way, you can find the best position to approach the green, depending on where the pin is located. Once you discover those spots, you can step off the distance to the tee and determine if you need to use your driver or another club to hit to the optimum area.”

John added, “Many courses can have a hilly terrain, and Ben felt that the golf course designer almost always establishes flat spots intended for positioning yourself off the tee. He said the only sure way to see these flat spots is to view them from out on the fairway looking back toward the tee.”

One day John and Hogan were playing at Shady Oaks, and they came to the tee of a par five. Ben gestured to John to stay in the cart because they were going for a little ride. They drove to the top of a rise in the fairway about 265 yards from the tee and got out of the cart. Ben took out his 5-iron and surveyed the area for a moment. Then he walked over to a flat spot and axed the club-head into the turf. He said that was the target spot the architect had designed to give golfers the best chance to get home in two.

With his point made, Hogan said they should now go back and play the hole. They were returning to the cart when Hogan stopped, turned, and walked back to the flat spot. He took a tee from his front pocket, bent down, and fixed the gouge he'd just made. "I was thinking how thoughtful he was to repair his mark," John said, "but as Ben stood up, he told me he didn't want a bad lie for his second shot."

This common ritual was typical of Hogan's thoroughness in preparing for tournaments. During his practice rounds for the British Open at Carnoustie in 1953, he walked that course backward—from the 18th green to the first tee—many evenings after dinner. He was memorizing hazard locations, fairway and green undulations, and optimum landing areas for his tee shots. Records show that in 108 holes of play at Carnoustie, his ball landed in the rough only once during a practice round.

### *Worst Ball*

Hogan told John of a challenging but enjoyable game he called "worst ball." He said it's guaranteed to turn any golf course you've played into an entirely new adventure. This exercise is exactly the reverse of a scramble format, where you take the best shot of the twosome or foursome and each play from there.

Worst ball is played not as a team but individually. Each player starts by hitting two shots from the tee and picking the worst outcome. Then you hit two balls from that point, pick the worst shot and hit two more, and so on until you reach the green.

Once on the putting surface, you must make two putts from the same spot to finish the hole. No matter how great a putt you pull off, you must execute it twice in a row for the shot to count.

Hogan recommended this playing drill to John as a way to

gauge his scoring skills. He said it would help hone John's ability to concentrate and would keep the pressure on to execute consistently well. "If you can score even par playing worst ball," Hogan said, "you're ready for tournament golf."

### *Different Shots, Same Swing*

During one of their earlier sessions, John asked Hogan about working the ball left and right. Hogan told him to hit four different shots: high draw, low draw, high fade, and low fade. John performed them adequately. Then Hogan pointed out that John had used four different swings and that under any pressure, they would fold like a deck of cards.

Hogan gave John one of his famous laser-eye looks and said, "Life is too short to perfect one swing, let alone different swings to draw or fade the ball. We are creating a machine, your machine, where your hands are the chuck and the club is the tool. If you want to work the ball, turn the tool in the chuck. Never alter the mechanics of your machine to alter the direction of the shot."

Think about it a moment, and you'll see how simple it is, he told John. You draw or fade the ball simply by adjusting your stance while keeping the clubface square to the target line. (Tiger Woods presented this same basic method in one of his *Golf Digest* instructional features. Unlike Hogan, however, Tiger appears to have mastered several variations of his golf swing, and he usually performs them quite well in competition.)

Hogan then explained how to get a variety of shots with the same basic swing.

- **Fade:** Align your stance—feet, shoulders, arms—slightly to the left of the target line. Turn the club ("tool") in your hands

(“chuck”) so that the clubface is aimed straight toward the target. Use your regular swing. The club should follow the line of your stance and cut across the ball, putting a clockwise sidespin on it, thus causing it to fade to the right. The ball should start out heading left of the target line, then curve back toward the center.

- **Draw:** Do the reverse of the fade. Align your stance slightly to the right, but set the clubface square to the target line. Use your regular swing. The clubface should follow the line of your stance and put a counterclockwise overspin on the ball, thus causing a draw to the left. The ball should start off to the right and curve back toward the center.
- **Low shots:** Position the ball back in the stance so that the clubface meets the ball as it descends to the bottom of the swing arc, thus keeping the ball down on a lower flight path.
- **High shots:** Position the ball slightly forward in the stance so that the clubface meets the ball at the bottom of the arc, thus lifting the ball into a higher flight path. (In a normal swing, the bottom of the arc usually is reached *after* the club strikes the ball and continues downward to take a divot.)

Hogan told John that he could fine-tune the ball's behavior by practicing to see how much to realign the stance and ball position to get the precise shot he wanted. He reminded John that while the setup may be adjusted, the same swing movements should be used for every shot.

### *Understanding Centrifugal Force*

One day John led me into the backyard of his home in the suburbs of southern California. He lived in a residential community

of Carlsbad, where the houses are high on a hill and everyone on his side of the street had an open view of the surrounding mountains and hillsides.

Evidence of John's handiwork graced the entire backyard. He was the kind of guy who had to stay busy, and if he wasn't teaching golf, he was building something. He designed and constructed an impressive gazebo in the back right corner, where he and his wife, Gay, had exchanged their wedding vows. He also built a cascading waterfall and a flowing stream, complete with a small walking bridge, that dissected the neatly manicured lawn.

We met this way quite often, especially during my first year of intensive training in the Maximum Golf School teaching system. Since John didn't engage in follow-up sessions with his students after each school, he increasingly relied on me to handle that responsibility. He wanted to be certain that I received a thorough understanding of all the principles and techniques in his curriculum.

John ushered me over to the patio, where he explained my lesson for the day. He said that Hogan often pulled him aside to point out a particular movement in the swing. Today, for me, it was the right elbow.

John kept a bushel of odd clubs nearby for practicing his swing or launching old golf balls out into the hills. Across the yard, a fence stood guard over a cliff that dropped down about sixty feet into an area occupied by an elementary school. John told me that he often hit balls from the ledge of the cliff, but only well after school hours, in case he hit a fat shot or two.

He grabbed one of the clubs and said, "Watch this. Hogan showed me this exercise to illustrate the importance of the right elbow in the swing."

John took his regular grip and addressed an imaginary ball.

Then he removed his left hand from the club. He swung the club back to about a three-quarter turn, initiated his downswing, and as he turned through the impact zone, he released the club into the blue yonder.

(Hogan credited this exercise to Jack Burke Sr., whose golf students included Babe Zaharias, Henry Picard, Jimmy Demaret, Jack Grout, and Jack Burke Jr. In the exercise, Jack Burke Sr. had his students take the club back, start the downswing, and then, as it came through the hitting area, release their grip and let the club fly out onto the practice range. Jack Jr. would run out and shag the clubs. The throwing sensation enabled his pupils to feel a smooth swing tempo and the flowing power of a full release *through* the ball to the finish. Hogan revised this exercise by taking the left hand off the club so that he could highlight the function of the right elbow. Decades later, in his book *Extraordinary Golf*, Fred Shoemaker featured this same club-throwing technique that Burke had originated in the 1940s.)

“See that?” John asked, as we both watched the club bounce off the fence. “If you load the right elbow on the way down and let the lower body lead into the hitting area properly, centrifugal force releases the club as you continue turning around your spine toward your target.”

“Loading the right elbow” is how Hogan described the function of the right arm in the downswing. When you “load,” you drop the right elbow into the right hip, where it compresses as the body turns. The right elbow becomes a pivot around which the arms and hands unleash the clubhead through the ball. This happens naturally if the arms and hands remain passive and follow the body’s turn.

Looks easy enough, I thought. So I grabbed one of the old clubs and readied myself to give it a heave. I loaded pretty well



and kept my right elbow close in to my torso as I turned back and then started my downswing. When I came into the hitting area, though, my elbow came up and out, my right hand collapsed, and the golf club flew off to the left, where it bashed into a large, dense bush.

“What happened?” I asked.

“Same thing that happened to me the first time I tried,” John reassured me. “You have to continue leading with the right elbow all the way *through* the hitting area, not just *to* it. When your turn reaches the center point of the swing, centrifugal force takes over and releases the club straight toward the target.

“Later, when you grip properly with both hands, this movement automatically uncocks your right hand as it flings the club-head through the ball. This exercise is to help you get the feeling of how the right elbow stays in tight through the downswing and how the hands get released automatically through the hitting area.”

I tried it again, and the club dove straight into the same bush.

John smiled and said, “That’s okay. You’ll get the hang of it soon enough.”

I tried for the rest of the afternoon, throwing those stupid clubs and then going to pick them up. I was amazed at what a struggle it was to get the right elbow to stay close in to my torso and let the release happen by itself. After I don’t know how many throws, I finally relaxed enough to rely on the power of my body’s turn to do the trick. The feeling of fluidity in the movement was something I’d never before experienced. Best of all, I felt that rare sense of breaking new ground and entering a new dimension of knowledge hidden from me before that moment.

I immediately began to incorporate the flowing impression I received from throwing clubs into the act of swinging *through*

the golf ball. In the past, most of my energy had been directed at the ball, and I felt that the direction of its flight was controlled only by where I aimed. Now, however, with this new understanding of how to employ the right elbow, my body felt like a coordinated machine that would propel my turn through the ball with explosive energy straight toward the target. My right arm wasn't wandering out and "over the top" anymore. I was thrilled to experience this phase of Hogan's famous "chain action" and feel how it kept my swing on line with new power and consistency.

That, in itself, was a huge improvement. When John later taught me how to incorporate the proper use of the left arm into this movement (see the next section), the sensation of being connected and in control as I unwind in the hitting area was, and continues to be, phenomenal.

### *Getting a Grip on the Missing Link*

Shortly after John narrowly missed hitting into an array of plate-glass windows during an earlier session with Hogan, he began to feel devastated at the thought of changing his grip to Hogan's recommended weak hand position. He despaired that he'd hit everything right with no end in sight. So he went back to Hogan the next day for a "grillroom chat," in hopes of finding a solution.

Hogan was at his customary corner table having a bite to eat, and he invited John to join him. John sat down and described his dilemma. Hogan thought a moment and told John that he must *want* to change his grip or the change would never fully take place. The old grip would tend to come back little by little, and, eventually, John would end up with the same strong hand position he'd had when they first met.

"I fought it for years," Hogan said.

John still didn't feel comfortable with the idea and asked how he could make himself *want* to change to a grip that felt weak and out of control.

"I'll show you after we eat our lunch," Ben said. They finished eating and went out to the practice tee, where Ben told John to get his 7-iron and to set up in his normal stance, with flexed legs and a straight spine angle. Hogan turned John's elbows inward until they pointed toward the hips but told him to take his regular strong grip. Hogan asked him how he felt. John said he was fine.

Then Hogan said, "Take the club back halfway until your hands reach hip level and then stop." John obliged.

Hogan came over and told him to start the downswing with the lower body and he would guide John's hands and arms into the hitting area. When John's hands approached the impact zone, Hogan took John's left elbow and started turning it toward his left hip. John said he felt the back of his left hand and the palm of his right hand turn toward the ground.

"See that?" Hogan said. "When the left elbow turns inward and gets out of the way, the hands can work properly without interference. The only problem is the position of the clubface. Where is it pointed?"

John saw that it was pointed left of his target.

Hogan explained that if you swing properly with a strong grip, the clubface will be closed every time as it enters the impact zone. At this point, he continued, there are only two ways to keep the clubface square to your line: (1) change your grip and let the left elbow do its job, or (2) return to the old sliding motion, a move that robs you of power and requires you to get "handsy" again to control the clubface.

"I suggest you do what I did and start by modifying your

grip,” Hogan said. “The grip is the foundation that sets up the rest of your swing. It’s the only dependable way to control your club in pressure situations.”

John said he started hitting short shots using the new weak grip, making sure the left elbow turned in to square the clubface. Then he moved on to full shots. In the beginning, he hooked a lot of balls because he unconsciously kept reverting to his old stronger grip, but his determination and practice began to keep his hands in line and make this left elbow move feel natural and reliable. Soon it became something he could count on, a certain way to keep the clubface on line with the target, time after time.

Now that he understood the wisdom of the weaker hand position on the club and how the clubface is controlled by the left elbow, John said he *wanted* to change his grip.

John told me that very few people understand the importance of this simple but essential movement. Recently, after a lifetime of observing endless analyses of Hogan’s swing by teaching gurus and players alike, I realized that the role of the left elbow is the missing link in the search for Hogan’s complete “secret.” It’s the final step that, to my knowledge, only a handful—Ken Venturi, for one—have ever understood and no one has ever brought forth in a complete analysis of Hogan’s swing.

Some contemporary analysts and instructors have observed that Hogan didn’t keep his own elbows turned inward at address or throughout the swing. This is true for the post-accident Hogan swing and for part of his earlier days, when he was just discovering the importance of this move. Hogan’s body was badly beaten in the head-on bus collision in 1949, especially his shoulders, collarbone, pelvis, knees, and left ankle. He told John that he could no longer set up or swing the way he wanted to

because of the pain and the way his bones had healed. He said that he had to train himself to bring his elbows closer together after his swing was underway because he couldn't do it during the setup.

In a masterful remake, Hogan had modified elements of his swing to accommodate his crippled body. Yet he emphatically warned John not to mimic his current swing but to learn the fundamental movements Hogan was now teaching him. "I'm showing you the swing I would be using now if I were physically capable," he told John.

One of my great joys in teaching is when golfers come to me with their slicing woes. I've helped hundreds of players cure this persistent nemesis. I've had them hitting a nice little draw within minutes after I showed them how to turn the left elbow inward and let the hands follow the arms into the impact zone. It's one of those "Bingo!" moments where once you see it happen, you realize that this profound little move has been here all along, just waiting to be discovered and put to work.

It's been said that a true genius makes complex things simple, and that's what Hogan did with this left elbow move.

### *Pronation and Supination*

One day John asked Ben, "I have to admit, I really don't understand much about pronation and supination. What are they, and what do you do with them?"

"Forget about all that," Hogan said bluntly. "They're just words for what happens when you swing correctly. When you set your arms and elbows inward and let your shoulders move them as your body turns, the hands will tend to pronate and supinate naturally."

*Pronate* means “to turn or face downward.” *Supinate* means “to turn or face upward.” Technically, during the backswing, the left hand pronates and the right hand supinates. The opposite occurs on the downswing. These are correct definitions but are usually too complicated to visualize—no wonder Hogan advised John to “forget about all that.”

Hogan emphasized that the movement, not what you call it, is what's important. He then described the actions to take for correct hand movement.

On the backswing, roll the hands clockwise and keep the elbows close together and tight to the torso as you turn properly around your spine. Hogan told John to observe how he immediately rolls his hands to the right to initiate his swing. He said this hand action sets up a powerful return move and increases club-head speed by a significant amount. He also gives his left wrist a slight twist inward as further insurance that he won't hook the ball.

On the downswing, Hogan added, simply let the hands be relaxed and passive. Correct rotation of the arms and elbows will return the hands to their original setup position and will bring the clubface straight through the ball.

Hogan was adamant that the only tasks for the hands are to grip the club properly, cock the wrists, and *follow* the arms—not to direct the club through the swing. That way, the hands assume their proper role in the chain action that Hogan describes in his *Five Lessons: The Modern Fundamentals of Golf*.

Call it what you may, Hogan said, this series of movements is the only certain way to consistently square up the clubface under the pressure of tournament play. (More on this in chapter 6, “The Legendary Golf System.”)



The key to understanding the many facets of Hogan's secret, John emphasized, is that all components in the chain action must be used in concert as an integrated system for the swing to work effectively. And when they are used together, he said, it's almost like being in Hogan's shoes and experiencing the unimaginable thrill of his powerful, flawless golf swing.

