

PROLOGUE



HOGAN AND I DROWN OUR SORROWS

The waiter covering Ben Hogan's corner table in the Shady Oaks Country Club grillroom was seldom hard to summon. Whomever had the assignment always seemed to keep one eye peeled for even the slightest gesture that meant

the club's aging icon desired service. On this late-autumn day in 1992, the waiter was asked to bring vodkas on the rocks with a twist, one for Hogan and one for me. The two of us had been sitting there awhile drinking white wine, and white wine was not doing the trick.

All of Fort Worth, Texas, had sunk into a gloom since the announcement several months earlier that Cosmo World, the Japanese parent of the Ben Hogan Golf Company, had sold its famous subsidiary to a new owner who decided to dismiss almost the entire workforce and move the operation to Virginia. For me this meant the end of a great run.

I had one of the lead roles in the drama, having spent the previous three years as president of the Ben Hogan Company. The sale meant my ticket would be punched. Mr. Hogan—you will have to forgive me, but it is difficult to call him anything else—had started the company in 1953. Even though he sold a controlling interest in it to AMF seven years later, he was on the scene the entire time and had remained both the face and the conscience of the organization. Now, that would all end. To make matters worse, this was a distress sale of a healthy subsidiary by a cash-strapped parent company. The distress was all due to Cosmo World's disastrous acquisition of the famed Pebble Beach resort on the Monterey Peninsula. At least in name, I had been in charge of that operation, as well.

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Which is why I was surprised to be sitting at Hogan's table in the first place. We were in the midst of an agonizing transition. I was tasked with carrying out the new owner's directives to downsize the company and extricate it from various long-term promotional commitments. As president of the company, my relationship with Hogan had suffered in this lame-duck period, especially after it was announced that the company would move from Fort Worth to Richmond, Virginia. Naturally, Hogan was angry with me for letting this happen. With the move came wholesale terminations—in all, some five hundred people lost their jobs.

There had been a steady stream of longtime employees stopping by Hogan's office to thank him and say good-bye.

The farewells and good wishes took their toll. Day by day, the pain of it seemed more deeply etched into his face and more evident in his halting movements. Then, one morning, I stopped by his office for a cup of coffee and our regular visit. He was seated behind his oversized desk in his customary suit—a nicely tailored, light gray suit; white shirt; and dark tie—just like any business executive might wear. He had a stern look as I sat down in front of his desk. He said he had an idea he wanted to discuss with me over lunch at Shady Oaks Country Club—his sanctuary away from work and out of the public eye. I asked him if he wanted to talk about it now while at the office, and he said no, offering no reason.

This was the first time he had ever asked me to lunch. There really wasn't anything unusual about that. The grillroom at Shady Oaks was his private retreat. People left him alone there. No one bothered him for autographs, and only friends dared approach him. It wasn't that Hogan wasn't friendly or courteous to everyone; it was more in deference to what everyone thought he wanted and the mystique that surrounded him. It protected him like an electrified chain-link fence. I was a member at Shady Oaks, and I would have liked to have thought that Hogan considered me his friend by then, but even I never wanted to cross that line uninvited. So I agreed to meet him at noon at his large corner table overlooking the 18th green. I could not imagine what he wanted to talk about.

As it turned out, the big idea he wanted to share with me was quite poignant. He told me he had found a building and some property a little north of Shady Oaks Country Club and wanted to start a new golf company called Henny Bogan, and he wanted me to run it. I was flattered and replied there would be nothing I would rather do, but given the circumstances, it was probably something that we should not do. I reminded him he had signed a noncompete agreement and was legally barred from taking any role in the golf equipment field. His name for the proposed new company I later saw as a tragicomic touch. Through youth and adolescence, Hogan had been known as "Bennie" and never "Ben." Sometime in childhood, he invented a sort of alter ego for himself, whom he called Henny Bogan. The new brand name was not

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thought up on the spot as a clumsy evasion of trademark rights: it harkened back to Hogan's difficult, early years, like the sled named Rosebud in the final scene of *Citizen Kane*.

Hogan and I continued to talk after lunch, but we dropped the Henny Bogan idea from any further discussion. The vodkas arrived in timely fashion—"clearies," as the executive team around Hogan called them, or "seethroughs." I had never had straight vodka on the rocks before; now they were coming one round after another. The overcast sky outside dimmed. It struck me that I was experiencing one of the coolest days of my life: here I was slowly getting plastered with Hogan. His guard was down, and he felt like talking. My natural inhibitions were loosened by the confidence induced by the Smirnoff.

Our conversation flowed.

He told me stories that were reruns of tales told before, but I enjoyed hearing them again. It was therapeutic for both of us. Before me was someone whom the Scots admiringly called "the Wee Ice Mon" for his imperviousness to competitive pressure. Others picked up on this general sangfroid as indicative of a dislike of people, but all I could see that day, and all I remember now about Hogan was his passionate love for the game and his golf company. And his great empathy pushed him near the point of tears as he considered employees tossed out after years of dedicated service to the Ben Hogan Company. At this point in his life, nothing worse could have happened. Ben and Valerie had no children. The Ben Hogan Company, apart from his stellar playing career, was his legacy to the game. It was his pride and joy. He told me that he regretted selling the company to AMF back in 1960. He said he had needed AMF to run and build the business because he could not do it himself. But he lost control, and there was not anything he could do about it. The regrets he expressed brought us both to the brink of tears. I had never felt so much anguish and helplessness in my life. The sense that I had let him down was probably the worst of it.

Perhaps out of necessity our conversation turned to less serious topics. There was even a little humor as he began to reminisce about happier times. I had been mostly listening, asking a question here and there. I relished this private time with the legendary figure. As the afternoon progressed, I asked him if he ever dreamed about golf. He sat back in his chair, smiled knowingly, and said, "Yes, I remember dreaming about playing at Augusta. I had seventeen consecutive holes-in-one, and on the eighteenth hole, I hit a great drive, and the ball just lipped out," [thwarting the ace and a perfect score of 18]. "I have never been so goddamn pissed off in all my life," he recalled, shaking his head and laughing.

I laughed with him, but to me, that dream was somewhat of a metaphor for his life. He had done his best and had come close to perfection in so many ways, only to have it fall apart at the very end. The relocation of the Ben Hogan Company was the lip-out of his life, I thought to myself. I congratulated

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myself inwardly on such a “profound” observation. Sitting around and philosophizing about the meaning of life with Hogan was beginning to seem like a fine way to pass the time. I formulated a provocative question and posed it to him: “Have you ever had a bad day at the golf course?”

He gazed thoughtfully for a moment, then turned back to me with his answer. “I can honestly say that I have never had a bad day on the golf course. Learning to play this game is all about improvement. My goal was to become a better player every day. If I learned something that made me a better player, it was a good day. And there was never a day that I didn’t learn something, especially if it was what you called a ‘bad day.’ Every day was an opportunity to improve, and in fact, there were more opportunities on bad days. My only regret was that there were not more hours in the day to work on my game.” We both took a few more sips of the *clearies*. I was lost in thought at the power of what he had just said. Breaking the silence, he leaned over to me and asked me if I wanted a cigarette. This was about the third or fourth time he had offered me one that afternoon, and each time I had said, “No thank you, I don’t smoke, but please go ahead.” But, this time, I thought it was kind of funny, and feeling more familiar, I said, “Ben, I still don’t smoke, but I am willing to learn.” We both laughed. Our conversation had been somewhat an emotional roller-coaster ride, and I was beginning to wonder if either of us should drive home, so I asked him if he was feeling okay. Ignoring my question, he said, “Did you ever learn *the Secret*?”

“Yes,” I said, “you told it to me in your office, not that long ago.” In fact, he had already spent two intense mentoring sessions with me: one on the Shady Oaks driving range and the other at his office, trying to teach me his famous secret to the golf swing. This secret was a *Life* magazine cover story and series of articles in 1954, and had been a mainstay of the Hogan mystique ever since. “No, that is not what I asked you, David,” Hogan said, “What I meant was . . . did you ever *learn* it?” I was distracted, still pondering the personal epiphany I had previously experienced when he said he had never had a bad day on the golf course. At this point, Hogan’s lower lip began to rise over his upper lip, a sure indication of dismay. I took that as his sign he was losing patience with me. Perhaps he was disappointed that I was not capable of comprehending his meaning.

After another uncomfortable pause, I felt compelled to say something:

“Mr. Hogan, I guess . . . ”

And then, he interrupted me saying, “That’s okay, someday you might understand. Then again, maybe you won’t.”



SIR NICK MAKES A CAMEO APPEARANCE

There was never a time in my tenure at the Ben Hogan Company when Hogan wasn't sought out by world-famous golfers. Nick Faldo,¹ who by then had established himself as a world-class player, contacted Hogan's office in November 1992. Faldo had won British Open titles in 1987, 1990, and 1992. He won the Masters in 1989 and 1990 and would win it again in 1996, coolly overcoming Norman's six-stroke lead in the final round. So, it was without apologies that he sought an audience with the aged Hogan. Faldo was known as a big Hogan fan, so I took it in stride when Doxie Williams, Hogan's secretary, told me my friend Jody Vasquez (author of the book *Afternoons with Mr. Hogan*) had arranged a meeting for the following Friday between the two champions.

By this time, Hogan's memory was prone to lapses. Williams wanted me at the meeting to ease the conversation along. She knew my presence would prove helpful should there be any uncomfortable pauses—a rather likely possibility. Hogan was capable of giving short, clipped answers to very long, indepth questions. To prevent awkward gaps in the dialogue, you had to be ready with a follow-up question or some reasonably logical transition. At times, he would just forget what he was saying and needed a little reminder to get back on track.

The bigger problem was Hogan did not accept many visitors anymore. And now that he was getting along in years, he did not really keep up with current trends and events in golf. About a year earlier, I had brought Chip Beck over to meet Hogan after we signed him as a PGA Tour staff player (to represent the Ben Hogan Company by playing Hogan equipment on the PGA Tour). Beck had finished second and ninth on the PGA Tour money list in the prior two years, so he was one of the top ten players in the world at that time. He was also one of the nicest and most polite people I've ever met.

Beck clearly was nervous about meeting the legendary figure. I led him into Hogan's office and introduced him as the newest member of our professional staff. Hogan, in gracious tones, said, "Welcome to our company." Beck answered, "I am very pleased to be here and to now represent the Ben Hogan Company."

We sat down in front of Hogan's oversized desk and waited for him to speak. After a moment he said, "Tell me, are you going to play *my* tour?" (meaning the Ben Hogan Tour).

Beck politely responded, "No, Mr. Hogan, I play the big tour—the PGA Tour."

"Well, I would have liked to have played for the kind of money they are playing for on the Ben Hogan Tour," continued Hogan, "It teaches you how to travel, how to win . . . it's really a good thing."

Beck responded, "Yes sir, it is. It is a tribute to you, and I am proud to be a part of your company." Nothing more was said. The meeting was over. Beck showed some class by exiting agreeably and without hesitation.

With Beck's visit in mind, I held out hope Nick Faldo would fare better. Beck's time with Hogan had lasted all of four minutes, and for Faldo's visit, we had blocked off much of the morning at our offices. We had also booked a table for lunch at Shady Oaks. I had no idea how we would pass the time. I braced myself for one long, pregnant pause after another unless Nick could carry the conversation.

Faldo arrived promptly at 10:00 a.m. with an entourage that included his agent John Simpson and our mutual friend Jody Vasquez. In his hand, Faldo carried a much-worn and dog-eared copy of *Five Lessons* that he wanted Hogan to sign. That may have been the trick that lowered Hogan's guard. He shook Faldo's hand, examined the book, and sat down willingly to talk. Hogan was engaged, and to the extent that he was capable, quite animated and forthright with his responses. Faldo, to his credit, had come prepared. He asked Hogan about the golf swing, how he felt in certain positions when he swung— questions that reflected a deep familiarity of the Hogan golf philosophy. I had never seen Hogan so engaged in conversation with a professional golfer. As it turned out, this would be the last time anyone would be granted such an opportunity. Hogan answered all of Faldo's questions, even the obtuse ones. At one point, Nick asked, "What do I need to do to win the U.S. Open?" Hogan paused to reflect, and then told him, "You need to shoot the lowest score."

Now, there was silence. The air seemed to leak out of the room, and no one seemed to know what to say. Sitting off to the side and influenced as I was by Hogan's acerbic, bare-bones logic, I could only think that a stupid question earns its rightful response. Another moment or two passed; Faldo and his entourage started to laugh, thinking that Hogan was kidding. I knew that he was not kidding, and neither Hogan nor I were laughing. Plainly irritated, Hogan



While Hogan did have five U.S. Open medals, the USGA did not count his 1942 win in the Hale America National Open Golf Tournament (an alternative event for the USGA's cancelled U.S. Open during WWII). That tournament was held during the same time as the U.S. Open; it had 1,500-plus entries with some sixty-nine qualifying sites and was run like a U.S. Open. Most of the top players were competing, and the Hale America National Open had the largest purse on the 1942 PGA Tour. *Courtesy of the Historical Preservation Committee, Colonial Country Club, Fort Worth, Texas.*

put an end to the laughter by saying, "I am not making a joke. If by Sunday you have posted the lowest score, they will give you the U.S. Open medal. I know, because I have *five of them.*"

Faldo, his expression now duly serious, reverted to his original script of technical questions and soon had the conversation back on track. Displaying diplomatic instinct, he chose this interlude to have Hogan sign the worn copy of *Five Lessons* on a page containing one of the classic illustrations by Anthony Ravielli. Hogan was meticulous in everything he did. It took him a little longer than one might expect to sign something, and for Faldo, he also wished to write a short, personal inscription. He looked up from the page to say there was not enough room to sign where Nick had indicated. Faldo replied, "Sign it wherever you want."

Hogan found a suitable space and set to work. “What day is today?” he asked.

I started to say, “It’s Friday the . . .”

“No,” Hogan interrupted, “What year is it?”

Signing completed, the conversation continued. Faldo interviewed Hogan on a number of subjects, asking him what it was like to play professional golf in his day; what were the most important tournaments; how did he prepare for competition, etc. Hogan responded to each question with an acuity and attention to detail I had not observed in a long time. He talked about how there wasn’t much in purse money in the early days, how he and his wife Valerie drove from tournament to tournament, sometimes getting by on only oranges before he could cash another check. He mentioned that the North and South Championship used to be a prestigious event, and likewise the Los Angeles Open. He was blunt in saying that, in his day, a big event was an event that paid decent money. In fact, Hogan said, “The more money the tournament paid, the more important it was, as far as I was concerned.”

At this point, there was another pause in the conversation. I asked Faldo which tournament was next on his schedule. He said he was heading to South Africa to play in a big event—the Sun City Million Dollar Challenge. Hogan shook his head and said something like, “That is just too far to travel to play a tournament.” Then Hogan turned to Faldo and asked, “What do they pay for first place?”

“First pays a million,” Faldo said.

I thought Hogan was going to go into convulsions.

Faldo returned to business, asking an array of questions on the technical aspects of the golf swing, as well as how to best prepare mentally for a major event. I particularly remember Faldo asking how to get over jumpy nerves. Hogan’s response: “Preparation. If you practice properly and have successfully hit every shot that you might need to play, then you won’t be so anxious.” Hogan had long been the exemplar of preparation, planning, and practice and almost always answered questions of this type the same way.

Moving on, Faldo asked Hogan what the most important club in the bag was. We all knew that Hogan would not say the putter. It was usually wise not to even mention putting around Hogan because that was a sore spot with him.