9-1-2006

The Secret of Hogan's Swing: Alum's book explains all

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol49/iss3/27

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Legendary golfer Ben Hogan, who died in 1997, was one of the greatest ball-strikers the game has known. And while Hogan left behind a finely detailed blueprint of his much-admired swing — his book, *Five Lessons: The Modern Fundamentals of Golf*, remains a classic of golf instruction — there has always been speculation that Hogan did not reveal everything he knew.

The list of folks who have proffered a guess as to what constituted Hogan's "secret" includes former caddies, golf writers, teachers and, of course, Hogan's fellow golfers. The secret, they surmised, was the position of the right knee during the swing, or allowing the body to slide forward rather than turn during the downswing, or opening the clubface just a bit at address.

Thomas Bertrand, a 1979 Furman graduate, has joined the decades-old conversation in a big way. His book, *The Secret of Hogan's Swing*, hit stores in October and is likely to be the subject of some controversy. Co-written with Printer Bowler, author of *The Cosmic Laws of Golf*, and published by Wiley & Sons, the book promises to divulge that one piece of information that Hogan kept to himself.

"I think the book will be a little controversial because people have such a sense of what Hogan's swing was all about, what made him such a great ball-striker," Bertrand says. "I just hope to help people understand where Hogan was coming from when he was talking about his swing."

So how did the 49-year-old Bertrand come to know Hogan's secret? How can he claim to have discovered what Hogan's contemporaries could only speculate about?

It's a long story, and it's no stretch to say it began at Furman. Bertrand, a native of New Jersey, transferred to Furman in 1977 after attending community college in the state and playing on the school's championship golf team. He chose Furman because it had a golf course and was located in a temperate climate.

But the financial aid package he needed to play golf for the Paladins never fully materialized, and he got a part-time job instead to help pay the bills. Still, he enjoyed his Furman experience and graduated in 1979 with a degree in political science.

After graduation, Bertrand and two buddies — Steve Salvatore '80 and John Riley '81 — slowly made their way across the country, playing golf during the day and working in restaurants at night. They finally settled in California, and while Salvatore and Riley ultimately made their way back to the East Coast, Bertrand remained in the Golden State. There he met John Schlee, a former PGA Tour winner perhaps best known for finishing second to Johnny Miller in the 1973 U.S. Open.

Schlee had developed a close relationship with Hogan and listened carefully as the master expounded on the intricacies of the golf swing, including the one bit of instruction that Hogan had never revealed publicly.

Bertrand began working with Schlee in his Maximum Golf Schools in the early 1980s, first as a pupil and later as an instructor. Since Schlee taught the Fundamentals of Hogan's swing, Bertrand learned them as well.

Bertrand's relationship with Schlee waxed and waned over the next 15 years; Schlee tried to play the Senior Tour, and Bertrand eventually left Maximum Golf Schools to open a restaurant. But Bertrand never forgot what Schlee had taught him, especially the "missing link" in Hogan's instruction.

Schlee died on his 61st birthday in 2000 after a lengthy battle with Alzheimer's. That's when Bertrand began to think about writing a book that would detail everything he had learned about Hogan's swing.

"Once John died, I felt it was important to tell people what I know," says Bertrand, who lives in Vista, Calif., with his wife and three children, and is back teaching golf at the Olympic Resort. "I wrote this book in honor of John and what he passed on to me."

If you expect Bertrand to provide you with that single piece of advice that will suddenly allow you to hit the ball like Hogan, you will be disappointed. Instead, the book's text and instructional photos offer an exhaustive, finely detailed description of how Hogan swung the club, from set-up to follow-through.

According to Bertrand, there is within that sequence a new piece of instruction that, for the first time, makes Hogan's swing thoughts complete. And while he will say that it has to do with how Hogan was able to square the clubface so consistently at impact, you'll have to buy the book to learn more.

— VINCE MOORE