CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN HOGAN: THE SIXTH LESSON

The Secret of Ben Hogan's Perfect and Automatic Swing

PRADEEP BAHIRWANI
Dedicated to
Ben Hogan and Homer Kelley
Reverse every natural instinct and do the opposite of what you are inclined to do, and you will probably come very close to having a perfect golf swing.

BEN HOGAN (1912-1997)
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THE MASTER WAS ADEPT not just at golf. He was a past master at camouflage too. The Master chose to play the Pied Piper in his book. He did not give away the Secret outright but placed ingenious clues throughout the book. Outside of it, he made famously quoted statements that were cryptic or had a double meaning or were contradictions in terms. I like to use the word Hoganism to represent these clues and decoys. Here we examine Hoganisms and try to demystify them. We also look at some other aspects of the Master’s swing.

Three Right Hands

The most controversial Hoganism is the Master’s wish for three right hands. Why did he not also wish for three left hands, especially after he stated that you must hit as hard with the left as with the right? The answer lies in simple physics. In Henny Bogan, the hands move
in a circular arc centered on the spinal axis with radius equal to the length of the right forearm plus the distance of the right elbow from the spine. However for simplicity we shall disregard the small distance from right elbow to the spine.

All components of Henny Bogan have the same angular speed but the linear speed of the hands is the common angular speed multiplied by the length of right forearm.

In Henny Bogan, the left arm and right forearm are passive and serve as clamps that transmit the power of the rotating hips and shoulders to the hands. Henny Bogan rotates as one unit and all its components have the same rotational speed at any point of time. But the linear speed of any component is proportional to its radial distance from the axis of rotation.

What the Master really wished for was a right forearm that was three times longer. That would have tripled the length of the right forearm and tripled the speed of the hands. But the Master could not have explicitly said so without giving away the Secret. So the Master said three right hands and left it as a cryptic clue for readers to figure it out. Most readers inferred that
the Master was hitting with his right hand and wished for three right arms to hit the ball harder. That cannot be correct because there is no place for independent arm thrust in Henny Bogan. It is rotational force – torque - all the way from start to finish.

One may want to do a simple experiment to verify the Three Right Hands observation. Take any door in your house. This is a vertical plane hinged to the side of the doorframe. The base of the door moves over the floor which is a horizontal plane. The base of the door represents the right forearm and the floor represents the Right Elbow Plane. With the door half open, place a golf ball close to the hinged edge of the door and another ball close to the free end of the door. The distance of the second ball from the hinged end should be three times the distance of the first ball from the hinged end. Now open the door fully by withdrawing it towards the wall. This is the backswing away from both balls. Next pull the door shut with some force. This is the forward swing through both balls. As the door slams shut, it will

This is the correct interpretation of the controversial Three Right Hands statement made by the Master.

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go through both balls in its rotational path. The ball that was closer to the outside edge will take off exactly three times faster and travel three times further than the other ball. This is no rocket science. It is the same principle that yields longer distances with clubs of longer lengths.

Supination and Pronation

*One of the most notable aspects of the Master’s swing is the retention of lag deep into the forward swing.*

The Master’s design of Henny Bogan required that the clubface be square to the arc throughout the swing. This can be done by hinging the wrists early as in the waggle and then freezing them in that squared position for the rest of the swing. But there is a catch – the release action then has to be a hitting or throwing action with the right forearm. But the Master wanted the release action to be caused by body rotation and not by arm or hand action. The Master was stumped temporarily before he discovered something that happens quite naturally in the golf swing: forearm rotation.
In the backswing the right forearm rotates clockwise by 90 degrees. This is called pronation. Pronation is reversed in the forward swing as the right forearm rotates counterclockwise by 90 degrees. This is called supination. Pronation opens up the square clubface of the takeaway arc. Supination squares up the open clubface of the approach arc. All this may seem trivial at first because the two simply cancel out each other. So why then did the Master go overboard with the much publicized Hoganism of supination and pronation?

The most efficient way to swing a golf club is to swing the handle, not the club head. Swinging the handle is applying longitudinal acceleration to the club head along the length of the club shaft. This is the most efficient way because it retains lag in the forward swing and causes a delayed release. The Master was overjoyed because pronation and supination gave him a natural and automatic way to retain his lag deep into the forward swing.

Longitudinal acceleration is built into Henny Bogan. The pronated right forearm allowed the Master to apply longitudinal pressure through hip-rotation starting from the top without having to artificially hold on to the wrist hinge by hand action. Pronation keeps the wrist hinge intact late into the forward swing till the hands reach the level of the hips. Supination starts to square up the clubface at the level of the hips when the wrists begin to unhinge and the impact interval begins. This is the most delayed release possible. The hands do not deliberately hold on to the wrist hinge. The wrists are passive and supple throughout the swing.
Pronation opens up the square clubface of the takeaway arc while supination squares up the open clubface of the approach arc.
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author is a former corporate executive and ex-Vice President at a global IT firm. In 2011, he took a sabbatical after two decades of career pursuit to explore his creative side and to learn to play golf. These twin passions morphed into a single all-consuming labor of love that gave birth to this book. Pradeep has a bachelor’s degree in engineering and lives in Bangalore with his wife and three kids.
CROUCHING TIGER IS IN YOU. HIDDEN HOGAN IS ALSO IN YOU. BOTH THE POTENTIAL AND THE ABILITY TO UNLEASH IT IS WITHIN YOU. GO FORTH AND PLAY THE GAME THE WAY IT WAS MEANT TO BE PLAYED: AT GOD’S FEET.

Ben Hogan is the most enduring icon in golf and his swing is the most studied athletic action in the history of sport. In 1946, after twenty-three years of relentless practice and continual experimentation, Hogan discovered a Secret that transformed him into the greatest ball striker of all time.

Hogan’s confidence in the Secret led him to state in his ground-breaking book Five Lessons: The Modern Fundamentals of Golf that any reasonably coordinated golfer could break eighty. When asked if the Secret was there in the book, he said that it was there and that it was easy to locate if told where to look. But Mr. Hogan never did tell. His blunt answer to the direct solicitation: The Secret is in the Dirt. Mr. Hogan was adamant about practice, hard work and self-discovery as a rite of passage.

In 1997, the Master passed away and the Secret was lost forever. This book decrypts Hogan’s complex web of clues and decoys to resurrect the Secret in its brilliant entirety. This book reveals a startling fact about human bio-mechanics that has never been published before in any medical or golf journal. This book is your key to the Holy Grail of Golf: Ben Hogan’s Perfect and Automatic swing.