Greatest Golf Photograph Ever

by
Peter Smolens



In 1953, at the US Open on the 18th hole at Merion Golf Course, Ben Hogan stood about 200 yards from the hole. After selecting his 1-iron, he hit what Cary Middlecoft called the "purest stroke I've seen." The ball ended some 40 feet from the hole. Hogan got down in two and beat George Fazio and Lloyd Mangrum the next day in an 18-hole playoff. It was his first major championship win following his near-fatal automobile accident.

Behind him was the first staff photographer hired by Sports Illustrated, Hyman "Hy" Peskin. Known for finding unusual angles for his photographs, Steve Fine, the director of photography at Sports Illustrated, told The New York Times, "Instead of following every other photographer to the green, Hy hung back and took his shot from behind Hogan."

Sports Illustrated ranked the result, "Hogan at Merion," as one of the best sports photographs of the twentieth century.

He was a pioneer of sports photography. Staking out a spot behind Ben Hogan, he captured an image of Mr. Hogan in full swing, showing the extra spike in his shoe for increased balance, and the crowd surrounding him looking out along a gorgeous course lined with fans.

"He had a wonderful ability to capture great moments in American sports," said longtime Sports Illustrated photographer Neil Leifer in an essay in the magazine. "You don't even see Hogan's face, yet it's all there: that perfect swing, his signature cap, the crowd. It's one of the most iconic sports photos ever taken, and Hy got it on one of the most important swings of Hogan's career. That was Hy: always defining an epic moment with an epic picture."



Leifer added, "Here's Ben Hogan on this incredible comeback from near death in an auto accident, and Hy takes this iconic photograph. I still feel like he was the greatest sports photographer of all time."

According to Don Wade in his book "Talking on Tour," a writer asked Hogan how he could pull off such a difficult shot under such incredible pressure after the round.

"I've been practicing that shot since I was twelve years old," Hogan said.

At some point following the round, the one iron was stolen, and Hogan replaced it with his seven iron. Some 30 years later, a collector purchased a used set of golf clubs for $150. Among the clubs was a one-iron with Hogan's name and a worn area the size of a dime in the center of the clubface perilously close to the hosel. He figured that it was the missing 1-

iron. He sent the club to Hogan, who confirmed it was missing. With Hogan's approval, the collector gave the lost golf club to the US Golf Association for their memorabilia collection. That's a small price to pay for a priceless piece of golf history,

Today, a plaque on the fairway of the 18th hole at Merion marks the spot from which Hogan whistled his now folkloric one-iron approach shot in the final round of the 1950 US Open and Hy Peskin's famous photograph.

Please Note: The illustration is my digital painting based on Hy Peskin's famous photograph.

This photograph is used as an illustration in my book, **"Golf a la Cart Version 2,"** now available on Amazon or by contacting me. It's also available as a digital print on Etsy. To purchase a print, go to the **pbsstudios.com** digital painting gallery section.

This article is also part of a weekly series of columns about golf holes I have played and photographed. The series includes original photographs or digital paintings based on photographed golf holes. Find other articles on my Facebook and Instagram pages.

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