



Ben Hogan at Carnoustie, Scotland. Hogan's British Open victory was his fifth major tournament triumph of 1953.

INTERNATIONAL

The Greatest Year of My Life

By *BEN HOGAN*, as told to *Gene Gregston*

With rare humility, a great American sports idol tells the story behind his amazing string of golf victories this year, climaxed by the winning of the British Open in his first try. Golfers will be fascinated by his account of how he adapted to the different British playing conditions; nongolfers, by this picture of a man who refuses to recognize the word "can't."

New York City greets "Bantam Ben" Hogan on the Texan's triumphant return from the British Open.

ASSOCIATED PRESS



CHIPPING out of sand is the hardest shot in the world for me to make. But such a shot proved to be the turning point this year in my first bid for the British Open championship. It came on the fifth hole of the final round at Carnoustie, Scotland, on Friday, July tenth. I was tied for the lead with Roberto De Vicenzo, of Argentina. Tony Cerda, also of Argentina, and Great Britain's Dai Rees were deadlocked at second, just a stroke back.

I had played the first four holes even par when Cerda, playing behind me, birdied the third hole. That made him one under fours. I knew he'd caught me. And I realized then that I had to get a couple of birdies someplace and shoot a 70, or right around 70, to win.

At the fifth, a slight dog leg to the right, my second shot hit the green, backed off and stopped in the fringe of a sand trap to the left and about thirty-five or forty feet from the pin. It hung on the edge of the

bunker, held by two blades of grass. It kept moving, barely. Then it stopped, still on the edge.

I didn't know how much sand was under the ball or if it could have been blasted out. But I couldn't take a chance on that, for fear the ball might go over the green and leave me in real trouble coming back downhill to the pin. So I chipped with a No. 9 iron, something I ordinarily would never do. I've never been able to chip out of sand successfully—usually I either leave the ball there or hit it too far.

This time, as luck would have it, I hit it just right. It was nipped just enough for backspin. The ball pitched against the bank of the green, skidded uphill to the pin, banged the back of the cup, bounced three or four inches into the air—then fell into the hole.

It was a birdie three, my first birdie on the final round. De Vicenzo had played nine holes one over par, so I felt I was in the lead by a stroke, the first time I had been able to get in front of the tourna-

ment. It had been a long, tiring road to that lead, and every step of the way reaffirmed my belief that no one does anything unless the Lord's with him. I think it was fate, and supposed to be, that I won this tournament. Otherwise, I wouldn't have won it or four other titles this year.

In a golfing sense this has been the greatest of my forty-one years, in that I have been fortunate enough to win five out of six tournaments. And personally it's been a tremendously satisfying year, if for no other reason than the homecoming celebrations given my wife, Valerie, and me in New York City and in our home town of Fort Worth on our return from Scotland.

Victory in the British Open was the climax of my 1953 tournament activity, and some have termed it the crowning achievement of my career to date. Yet the decision to undertake the trip had been difficult to make.

I told Valerie after the Masters Tournament in April that I thought I would enter the British Open—"if I win the U.S. Open." She wasn't excited at the prospect. She gets travel-sick regardless of the mode of transportation, and she knew what hardship the overseas trip would involve because we had made a similar journey with the Ryder Cup team in 1949.

But all she said was, "I should think you'd want to play in the British Open if you didn't win the U.S. Open."

That's Valerie, a wonderful wife, partner, companion, trainer and adviser who deserves more credit than I can possibly give her for any success I've had. Her answer more or less settled the question between us, but it still was far from definite, and no one else was told of my intention until some time later.

"If I win the U.S. Open"—that was a mighty big "if." But it ultimately did not rest on that. My entry for the British Open was mailed before the U.S. Open was played, and I knew then that I'd go to Scotland whether I won my fourth U.S. Open or not.

I went to the British Open for several reasons. First of all, the trip was not undertaken merely to bring their cup home. Naturally, any tournament I enter I try as hard as possible to win, but the main reason for my going was to satisfy so many people's wishes that I play. I felt that if they had that much faith in me and wanted me to represent the United States in the British Open, I should reciprocate.

The second reason was that it was a challenge. I'd always heard about Carnoustie—pronounced "Car-NOOSE-tee"—being one of the finest courses in the world and one of the toughest on which to score. Then everyone told me the weather posed a problem we don't have over here. I wanted to try my hand at it. Also, I wanted to see how I'd fare with the smaller-sized British ball. I'd heard it said several times that I could not play the small ball with my deep-faced clubs.



Hogan (smoking) did not lead until the last round at Carnoustie. "It had been a long, tiring road to that lead, and every step reaffirmed my belief that no one does anything unless the Lord's with him."

Many comments to the effect that people didn't believe I could win under those conditions came to me secondhand, and I was somewhat determined to prove that I could. I think that's been one of my driving forces all my life, because over a period of years people have said I couldn't do this or that.

Even at Colonial, my home course in Fort Worth, several said this year that I couldn't win because I wasn't a very good wind player.

[The wind was twenty-five miles per hour steady, with gusts up to forty miles per hour, each day of the tournament, and Hogan won by four strokes, with a score of 282.—*The Editors.*]

The third reason for the trip was that the United States Golf Association and the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews had made their rules identical, for the good of world golf, except the rule concerning size of the ball. The example of this standardization which most affected me was that the British agreed to permit use of the center-shafted putter after having banned it for many years. My putter, which has a brass-blade head made from an old doorknob while World War II was in progress and brass couldn't be obtained, is classed as center-shafted.

For another thing, the British Open this year came at a time when it didn't conflict with any of

my commitments in this country. It seems silly to have that many reasons for going to a golf tournament, doesn't it? After all, I am a professional golfer and playing tournaments is my business.

But we've done a lot of traveling in nineteen years—more than those years show, perhaps. We knew this trip would be tough. In fact, I don't think Valerie believed me at first when I told her I might go. And I kept delaying sending my entry until the deadline of June sixth neared. Then, after mailing it, I began to feel a pressure that I've never experienced before about a tournament.

It wasn't that I felt I might lose a lot by going, yet I believed that if I didn't win, everyone would say, "I told you so." And I think if I hadn't won, the people over there would have thought, *Well, American players aren't so good as they're supposed to be, especially under British conditions.*

You know, a great many people have built up in their minds a mythical Hogan who wins whenever he wants to win. Well, it does not work out that way. That's just not true. If you win 1 per cent of the tournaments you play, you're very lucky.

[Ben's too modest. A reasonable estimate of the number of tournaments he's entered is 550, and he has scored sixty-three victories, counting partnerships, in major

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Ben clears a path to the pin on Carnoustie's second green. Hogan's 282 was eight strokes better than the previous course record for 72 holes.



The Hogans after their near-fatal crash in 1949. Ben hopes his victories "give courage to people who are sick or injured and broken in body."

THE GREATEST YEAR OF MY LIFE

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professional competition. In that string of triumphs are four U.S. Opens, two P.G.A.'s, two Masters and the British Open. — *The Editors.*)

Some have asked me if I set out to make this a banner year because of a comparatively poor 1952 showing and comments implying that I was "through." Well, that comes within the "driving forces" I mentioned previously. When I went to Augusta, Georgia, for the Masters in April, I felt that I was hitting the ball better than ever before. I'd practiced every day of the winter. This is no plug for Palm Springs, California, but the turf there

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ASPEN GOLD

By Allison Ross

Drawing up gold from the graying
flowers,
From river and rainbow trout the
gold:
What wizard wisdom now em-
powers
Only the aspens to hoard and hold
Golden days in this browning chill
World with such a consuming
will?

Drawing down gold from the
embering sun,
The breast of the bluebird, the
fleeing hawk's
Fiery eye, willing gold from these
dun
Hills that man now no longer
walks,
They bestow it at last on earth to
keep
Remembrance under the long
white sleep.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

is ideal for development of your swing. It's firm, and the sand underneath gives it a good cushion. I think my four rounds of 70-69-66-69 for 274 in the Masters were the best I've ever shot in the course of one tournament.

[After the record-smashing Masters Tournament triumph, Ben won the Pan-American by three strokes with 286, tied for third at Greenbrier with 272, won the Colonial National for the fourth time and won his fourth U.S. Open with 283, also a new competitive-course record. — *The Editors.*]

All this time Valerie and I had been making preparations for the trip to Scotland. My mother, remembering 1949, when I became ill in Great Britain and had to return home, didn't think we should go, for fear of repetition of that sickness. I did get a touch of influenza this time, but it wasn't serious.

It's true my mother tried to get me to give up golf when I was a boy, but there's nothing to the story that at sixteen years of age I told her that someday I was going to be the greatest golfer in the world. She never did approve of my playing golf, however, and I'm still not sure she approves of it.

When we arrived at Carnoustie I had my first look at the course. It was quite a contrast to the beautiful farms and fields of the countryside. It was extremely drab-looking. The color

was a mixture between brown and green. There were no trees. It was land that's never been developed since the Year One, I suppose.

We stayed at the Tay Park House at Dundee, about eleven miles from Carnoustie. This is the National Cash Register Company's guest house for use of executives and business people who come to Dundee, where the company has a factory. We had been offered accommodations there before we left the United States. We rented a car, a British Humber, and hired a chauffeur for our stay there.

A professional caddie named Cecil Timms, or Timmy, about thirty-three or thirty-four years old, who had worked for Harvie Ward and Dick Chapman, two of our top amateurs, in previous British events, asked me for a trial. He proved to be satisfactory, if a bit too nervous.

Naturally I was eager to begin practice with the smaller ball and get acquainted with the Carnoustie championship course, where the tournament was to be played, and the shorter Burnside course, where one qualifying round was to be played.

The practice area at Carnoustie is about a mile out on the course from the first tee. But it also is an army firing range. So help me, it is. About 200 yards away they'd be shooting machine guns, rifles and pistols, and you'd be trying to practice. The noise was terrific, so I moved to the more private Barry course between Carnoustie and Dundee.

My daily routine started with a breakfast of bacon and eggs. Then I'd drive to Barry for an hour or an hour and a half of practice, have lunch, then drive over to Carnoustie for a round of golf in the afternoon. After dinner, there wasn't much time left in the evenings, but Valerie and I did attend two movies while we were there.

I played two or three balls on every hole of my practice rounds. You can hit the small ball a mile! I'd say, conservatively, that it goes twenty-five yards farther than the American ball, and against the wind there is more difference than that. My biggest troubles were getting accustomed to the distance I could hit the smaller ball and learning to judge distances on the course.

I kept finding myself taking about two clubs less than we would with our ball, and, I suppose just subconsciously, I'd then hit it harder than I should. Since I never was able to trust myself to look and judge what club should be used, I memorized what it should take from various places on the fairway, taking the weather and other factors into consideration, and I played the tournament from that memory.

Their wind isn't any stronger than it is at some places in the United States, but it's a lot heavier and has a lot more moisture as it comes in off the sea. For instance, in my practice rounds I never hit more than a light 8-iron on my second shot on the first hole. But on the first round of the tournament I hit a driver and a 2-iron just as hard as I could nail them because of the high wind in my face. That's how much difference it can make over there.

And par changes with the wind. If you play a hole in the morning and you're going downwind, it's a par four. But in the afternoon, if the wind has changed and you're facing it, the same hole is a par five. They don't go by par, as we know it, however. They judge play on "level fours," a total of 72 for eighteen holes.

In the United States we play what I term "target golf." Our courses have



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boundaries, or borders, of trees, fences and hedges, and our fairways are well defined, easily distinguishable from the rough. Sometimes at Carnoustie it was almost impossible to determine from the tee where the fairway ended and the rough began because fairway and rough were identical in color.

When they build a course they just go out and seed a tee, seed a green, mow a fairway between them and leave the rough the same way it's been for a thousand years and will be for two thousand more. They put sand traps everywhere. Traps on six of the holes were strategically placed in the middle of the fairway at the perfect driving distance required for those holes. You had to find your way around those traps because if you played short of them you could not reach the green on the second shot.

Normally, they mow the fairways about once a month and mow the greens about once a week. Since this type of course is easy to build and easy to maintain, golf is very inexpensive and everyone plays. The fee for a round at Carnoustie is forty-nine cents. It's unfortunate that we do not have a larger number of courses with similar fees, so more people could play golf over here.

Heather and gorse are abundant in the rough. Heather, something like a fern, grows in clumps about eight inches to a foot high and is as thick as it can be. If you get in it, you have to hit the ball about ten times as hard as you would otherwise, and then most times it won't go more than ten yards or so. I was in it only once, thank goodness, and that was on a qualifying round. It was up close to a green and fortunately I came out of it all right.

Gorse is taller, sometimes waist-to-head high, and is a brambly bush. I don't know what you do if you get into it, and I never wanted to find out. I didn't practice getting out of the gorse or heather because I figured anyone who got into it frequently wouldn't have a chance anyway.

Every fairway is rolling and full of mounds, and you hardly ever have a level lie. It was bounce golf. I'd hit a shot and never know which way it might bounce when it landed. I do know that in seventy-two holes of the tournament I never bounced an approach shot "stiff" to the pin. By that, I mean close enough for what we'd consider a cinch putt. You'd think in seventy-two holes anyone would "luck" one up there that close, but I never did.

It was what I'd call a "burn-happy" layout too. There are two burns, or creeks—the bigger Barry Burn and

Jockie's Burn—that play a large part in making the course difficult. In addition, there are several long ditches, or trenches, in the roughs. I suppose they're drainage ditches, but I don't know. In practice I tried to find all of them, not only because it was a certain one-stroke penalty if you hit a ball into one but because if I ever walked out into the rough I didn't want to fall into one and break my leg. They're about three feet deep, and I'm surprised there aren't a lot more one-legged golfers over there because of those ditches.

Their championship tees are called "tiger" tees. I thought this was because they were so far back in the heather and gorse that only tigers would be there. I didn't learn differently until my return to New York, when Bobby Jones told me where the name originated. The people call a golfer who plays from the back tees a "tiger," and the golfer who plays from the much shorter, front tees a "rabbit." I played several rounds at Carnoustie before I realized I was being a rabbit part of the time. You can't find some of those tiger tees unless you have a caddie or partner who knows the course well.

While practicing, I formulated my plans for the tournament. My degree of sharpness at the time governs my attack and expectations for a particular tournament. A lot of things enter into this plan—the type of course, the weather, places where there's a possible need for sacrifice, and places where chances may be taken. I believed after two weeks of practice that the tee shot would be the most important because of the course and the weather, and thought that a score of 283 would win it.

You have to hit an extremely long tee shot at Carnoustie—the course measures more than 7200 yards from the tiger tees—and you have to keep your drive out of the heather, gorse and sand traps. Therefore, I did a lot of practicing with wood clubs, more than I normally do for tournaments.

In qualifying rounds I shot a 70 at Burnside and a 75 at Carnoustie, the 145 total qualifying easily. Many have asked if I coast along in qualifying rounds. Let's put it this way: I try, all right, but I just can't work up to as high a competitive pitch as in a tournament.

When I walked up to the first tee at Burnside for my first qualifying round and first official shot in a British Open, I didn't see anyone in charge, no one announcing players as we do in America. There was a little house off to the side and a woman sitting in it by herself. The twosome in front had teed off

and played their second shots; still no one, not even my partner, Bill Branch, of England, who was a very quiet fellow, said anything to me about teeing off. So, when I thought it was about time, I walked onto the tee and put my ball down. Some people shook their heads negatively.

While I was waiting for some word, a train came up the tracks that run alongside the first fairway. The engineer gave me three short blasts on his whistle, stopped the train and waved. I didn't shoo him away, as the news stories reported. I merely waved back to him. Then I heard this horn go "beep-beep." The woman in the little house had blown the horn, and that was the signal to tee off. All the people lining the fairway on both sides nodded their heads, indicating it was now all right for me to drive. Valerie said later that she could see I was about to burst with laughter, and I was. It was all new and funny to me, but, I guess, perfectly normal to them.

On that first qualifying round I also learned that my caddie, Timmy, is a very nervous fellow. He was a good caddie. He treated my clubs as if they were the crown jewels and kept them clean and shining all the time. He took my shoes home with him every night to polish them. But when things got tight on the course, he'd get extremely upset. And the more nervous he became, the more he'd talk. Each time, I'd stop and quiet him. Many times when I'd have a long putt he'd hold his head down between his arms and wouldn't look, indicating his lack of confidence in my putting. And most of the time I didn't want to look either. I putted poorly over there. I knew the greens were hard and I kept expecting them to be fast, but they never were.

Timmy was never wrong. I don't ask a caddie what club to use, but if I picked a 5-iron, for example, and the shot was short, I might comment that I should have taken more club. Every time I did this, Timmy would say, "Yes, I had me hand on the four-iron." He always knew—after the shot was made.

On the first day of the tournament the wind was blowing very hard. About five minutes before Ugo Grappasonni, of Italy, my playing partner for the first two rounds, and I were to tee off, Bobby Locke, of South Africa, finished with a 72 and I had an opportunity to congratulate him.

I thought he'd shot a wonderful round in those weather conditions, and I thought he surely would be leading, or not more than one stroke back, after the first round. That proved to be wrong, however, because Frank Strana-

han, our fine amateur, shot a 70 and took the lead.

I shot a 73. My play that day was satisfactory, except for my putting. Leaving the course afterward, I was somewhat tired, as I usually am after the first round. It seems as though the first is always the most tiring round for me in a tournament. And as I had lost some twenty pounds since February, my weight was down pretty fine, as low as I wanted it to get.

The diet was restricted, of course, since they were still on rations, trying to recover from the war. Fruit was plentiful, though, and it helped me retain my strength. I also carried some candy fruit drops in my bag and ate them frequently for energy. At the start I gave Timmy a share of this candy, but on two rounds he ate all of his and mine too. Finally, after two or three warnings, he was convinced he'd better leave my candy alone.

I felt I played well in the second round, but again couldn't get my putts to drop, and scored a 71 that left me two strokes back of Britain's Dai Rees and Scotland's Eric Brown, who were tied for the lead at 142.

Rees, Brown and the other golfers from the British Isles played with much more confidence in their own surroundings and with their own ball. The transition was amazing, they play so much better over there than they do here. But just the reverse is true with our players, too, so I suppose it's like being more comfortable in your own home.

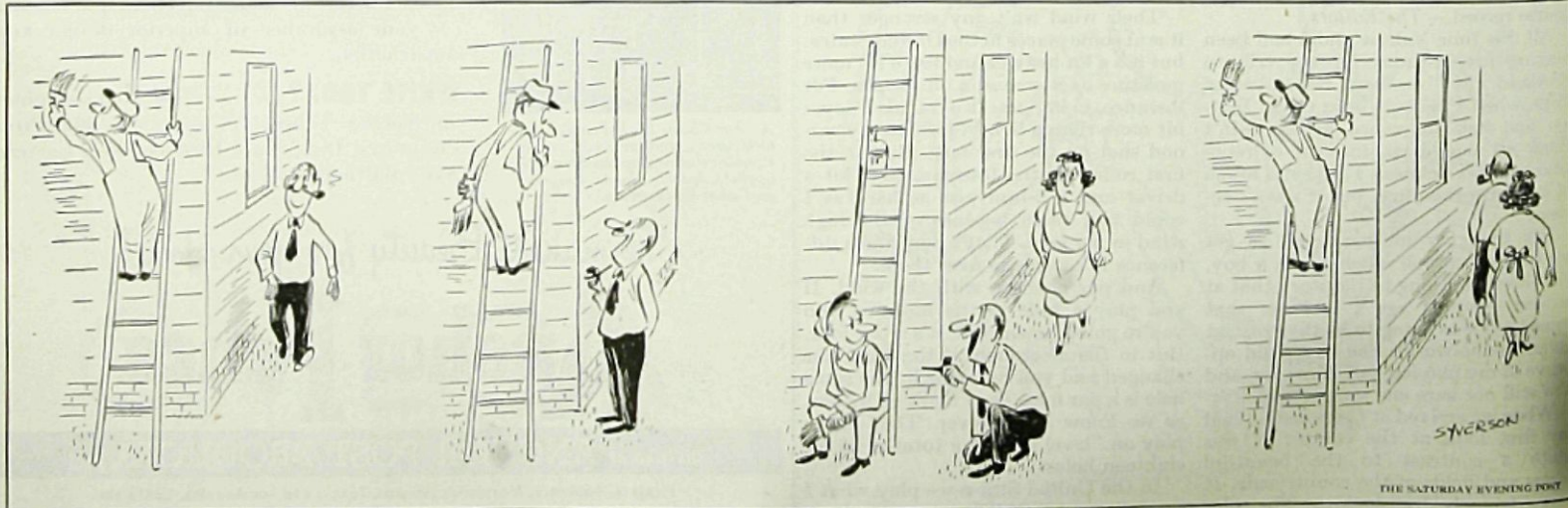
It seemed to me, however, that British golfers have a more leisurely approach to the game. Technically, their game is about the same as ours in so far as swing, stroke and method are concerned, and most of them use American-made clubs.

The field was cut for the final thirty-six holes. I had learned on the first two rounds, and, in fact, all the while I was over there, that the Scottish galleries, composed of people who came from all over the British Isles, are very respectful and know their golf well. They treated Valerie and me wonderfully.

I gained a tie for the lead in the third round of the tournament Friday morning by shooting a 70 for a total of 214, same as that of De Vicenzo. My partner for the last two rounds was Hector Thompson, of Scotland. Like Ugo Grappasonni, who could speak broken English, and Bill Branch, Thompson was a very quiet fellow.

It rained intermittently during the last three rounds of the tournament, but the wind wasn't as fierce as it had been on the first day. While eating my

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(Continued from Page 160)

lunch before the last round, I kept thinking of the job at hand. I felt that my original plan had to be changed somewhat. As the tournament progressed, the pressure kept building up, and although I didn't feel well physically, having taken the flu the night before, the excitement of being tied for the lead with one round to go was offsetting my physical discomfort, and I actually felt stronger moving into the afternoon's final round.

I always do. My blood stream seems to get an extra shot of adrenaline from my body. Knowing that I hit the ball farther in the final round than I ever do in previous rounds because of this added strength, I purposely underclub each shot. For instance, where I normally use a 5-iron in the first to third rounds, a 6-iron would be used in the final round.

I might add right here that the only time I alter my original plan for a tournament is on the last round, as I was doing this time, when I'm in a corner and have to fight my way out. If you're in front, you can let the other fellow make the mistakes. This time I was tied with De Vincenzo, and Rees and Cerda were only one stroke back.

The husky De Vincenzo was the strongest man over there and a very long driver. He could carry over at least three of those sand traps in the fairways, and was always using two or three clubs less on his second shots than anyone else. I thought before it started that he'd run away with the tournament with any sort of luck on the greens, and he might have had he not knocked a ball out of bounds on the ninth hole of the third round.

Rees is a little fellow, but a fine player. Cerda is about my size, five feet, ten inches tall and 160 pounds or so. He's not so strong as De Vincenzo, naturally, but he has a fine swing and a well-rounded game.

De Vincenzo was about six to eight holes ahead of Thompson and me when we started the final round. Rees was in front of De Vincenzo, and Cerda was behind me. I had played the fourth hole in even fours when I heard about Cerda's birdie on the third. That's when I was fortunate enough to chip in from the sand trap for the birdie three on the fifth hole.

When I made that shot and heard that De Vincenzo was one over at the

turn, I felt as the jockey must feel when he's finally poked his horse's nose out front of the pack in a Kentucky Derby.

I went through the first nine holes in 34. By then, I'd heard that Stranahan was in with 286 after shooting a great 69, and Rees had shot a 71 to tie Frank. De Vincenzo was playing the sixteenth or seventeenth and was still one over. The only thing I had to worry about was holding what I had and keeping track of Cerda right behind me.

But misfortune almost struck on the tenth hole. As I was taking my stance on the tee, out of the corner of my eye I saw this big black dog walk across the tee about ten yards in front of me. I thought I saw him walk into the crowd, but as I hit a full driver the dog walked back across. My ball didn't miss him two inches. If it had hit him, it probably would have killed the dog, could have messed up my score pretty badly and there might have been a different ending to this story.

I got my four on the tenth, though, and fours on the eleventh and twelfth. On the thirteenth I hit a 5-iron to the green and sank a twelve-foot putt for a birdie deuce, and that put me four under fours. De Vincenzo had finished one over for a 73 and a total of 287. I also learned that Cerda, who had stayed within one stroke of me through the eleventh hole, was now one over fours after his ball hit a spectator on the twelfth. I felt for the first time that I had the championship if I didn't do anything foolish.

Fortunately, I didn't. My good luck held and I finished four under fours for a 68, a total of 282 and victory in my first British Open. Someone informed me that the 68 was a new competitive eighteen-hole record for the Carnoustie course. I never had any thought of a record during the round, however, and I do not play to break records.

[The 282 was eight strokes better than the previous Carnoustie mark for 72 holes, and the second-best score ever posted in a British Open. It also missed Ben's pretournament calculations by only a stroke.—The Editors.]

I play to win, and I think the Lord has let me win for a purpose. I hope that purpose is to give courage to those people who are sick or injured and broken in body.

THE END

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