

THIS IS MY SECRET

Ben Hogan finally reveals the mysterious maneuver that made him a champion

Ben Hogan, the greatest golfer of his—and probably anybody else's—time, is also the creator of the game's most subtle intrigue. He has vowed steadfastly that the reason for success over the last decade has been a mysterious device incorporated into his swing. "It is easy to see if you know where to look," he said, and defied the world to find it. Wherever he hit a golf ball skeptical professionals and enthusiastic amateurs studied his every move. Almost everybody had a theory and six competent pros expressed theirs (LIFE, April 5, 1954) without

actually hitting on it. Some pros claimed Hogan had let them in on the secret, which Ben denies. One who professes to have found it is Jack Fleck, whose inspired play at San Francisco last month kept Hogan from becoming the first man to win the U.S. Open five times. "He might have used a secret," says Hogan, who watched him carefully, "but it wasn't mine." In this article, having decided to give up serious competition at the age of 42, Ben Hogan reveals his controversial secret and the circumstances which brought it into being.

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KEY TO THE SECRET is a simple maneuver illustrated by these close-ups of Hogan's hands. They show how Hogan's hands look when he is not using the secret and when he is. The maneuver is executed just before he reaches the top of his backswing. With a conventional swing Hogan's left wrist remains straight (*left*). When the secret is applied (*right*) the left wrist bends backward and inward forming a slight V. The most important of three things which constitute Hogan's secret (*see text*) is that it opens the club face to the fullest and makes it impossible for him to close it fast enough on downswing to get a fatal hook.

THE better swing you have and the better player you become—as far as hitting the ball, that is—the more definitely you become a hooker. The mechanics of a good swing demands a hook. To get distance the hands roll into the ball just before the point of impact and after it is hit the wrists roll over the top of the shaft. When hit this way—the way the best tournament players hit it—there is nothing for the ball to do but take off low and hard. It curls from right to left at the end of its flight. It comes into a green or fairway hot, like a fighter plane landing. It is very hard to control, or at least I found it so.

Most of the top players on tour today are fighting a hook. They fight it on almost every shot they make. When they miss a shot you will find them missing the green on the left. A hook is hard to judge. Maybe one week you will be able to judge it adequately, but then the next week you aim a little farther over to the right to compensate. Sometimes a hook gets so exaggerated that you don't know where to aim, or have room to aim it. I was in this predicament in 1946, although it was more of a crisis than a predicament. I was having trouble getting the ball in the air. I had a low, ducking, agonizing hook, the kind you can hang your coat on. When it caught the rough it was the terror of the field mice. I tried all the conventional cures—opening the stance, altering the grip, using more left arm and cutting the ball. They all worked, but in the process they cut down my distance by five to 10 yards. Five yards is a long way. You can't give anybody five yards. You can't correct a fault with a fault.

I was finishing in the money and occasionally winning a tournament, even with a terrible game. But the handwriting was on the wall. If I was going to stay and make a living, something had to be done. I left the tour and went home to Fort Worth about as desperate as a man can be. I sat and thought for three or four days. I did not pick up a golf club, although I wanted to in the worst way. One night while laying awake in bed I began thinking about a technique for hitting a golf ball that was so old it was almost new.

It had been recommended by the Scottish pros who came to this country to teach golf long ago. Called pronation, it flourished for a while and was then discarded as antiquated and unsound. It is a movement which commences the moment a player begins his backswing. The hands roll gradually to the right until the back of the left hand is facing almost straight up at the top of the backswing and the back of the right hand almost straight down. The face of the club opens with this roll of the hands. On the downswing the face of the club gradually closes again until it is theoretically in its original position as it meets the ball. In itself pronation is no cure for a hook. If anything, it helps to promote one. But for me it was the basis for a new experiment, and before the night was over I had added two adjustments, which on paper made pronation hook-proof without any loss of distance.

I was so eager to get out to the practice tee the next morning that I don't think I slept the rest of the night. The first ball I hit behaved in spectacular fashion. It had a nice, high, straight flight. Instead of

hooking at the very end it had a slight fade to the right. It came down light as a feather. The harder I hit the better it worked. There was no loss of distance.

I practiced six or eight hours and couldn't wait to come back the next day. It worked even better then and for a week after that. But I had to put it to a test. Sometimes things tried in practice fall apart when tension is put on. I went to Chicago for the Tam O'Shanter and it worked under all the stresses. I won the tournament. It was like learning to play golf all over again.

The two adjustments had transformed pronation into a bonanza for me. They were so delicate that no one would ever think of looking for them—and I certainly was not going to tell anybody where to look. The first was in the grip. I moved my left hand one-eighth to one-fourth inch to the left so that the thumb was almost directly on top of the shaft. The second adjustment, which is the real meat of the "secret," was nothing more than a twist or a cocking of the left wrist.

I cupped the wrist gradually backward and inward on the backswing so that the wrist formed a slight V at the top of the swing. The angle was not more than four or six degrees, almost invisible to the human eye. This simple maneuver, in addition to the pronation, had the effect of opening the face of the club to the widest practical extreme at the top of the swing.

At this point the swing had been made hook proof. No matter how much wrist I put into the downswing, no matter how hard I swung or how hard I tried to roll into and through the ball, the face of the club could not close fast enough to become absolutely square at the moment of impact. The result was that lovely, long-fading ball which is a highly effective weapon on any golf course.

Since stumbling onto this magic device 10 years ago, I have not seen it used by any touring pro. I was certain that it would take at least one stroke a round off a score and since we were competing, I withheld my discovery. It took more than one stroke a round off my score. I found that I did not have to work as hard because I had a ball that was easier to control. I did not have the worry and fright of getting the ball away. I was more secure in my game and did not have to practice as long or as hard as before.

In normal tournament play I used the secret approximately 90% of the time. Whenever I did there was nothing automatic about it. I was very conscious of cupping the left wrist. In fact, it was the only thing I concentrated on, the rest of my swing operating on muscle memory. I did not use it every time. If a shot required a hook I simply eliminated the twist of the wrist and got it.

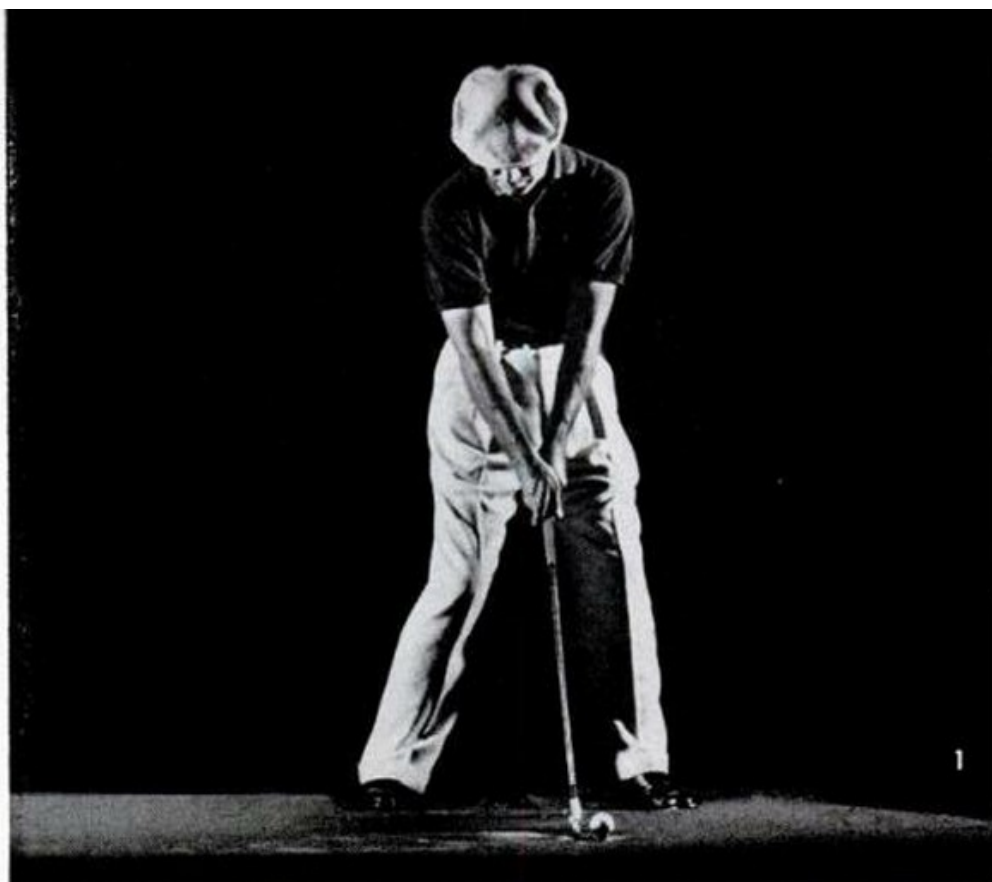
In this year's U.S. Open I could use my secret only about 60% of the time. At the Olympic Club in San Francisco most of the dog legs to the right had a wind from left to right so that the ball had to be hooked to hold a straight line. The 10th hole, as well as the 11th and 12th, required a hook or your ball would find the rough to the right every time. This is not an alibi because I can hook a golf ball about as well as anybody. I was such an expert at it once that it almost put me out of business.

Now that I am through with serious competition—and I worked harder getting ready for this last Open than any tournament in my life—I don't mind letting the world in on my secret. The technique of hitting a golf ball is improving all the time and I hope this will prove a refinement when golfers get to a certain point. I doubt if it will be worth a doggone to the weekend duffer and it will ruin a bad golfer. With the club so wide open at the top of the backswing anybody who fails to close it properly on the way down will push the ball off to the right—or worse yet, shank it off to the right at a horrible right angle. But it will be a blessing to the good golfer. I hope it helps some distinguished but frustrated hooker get to next year's U.S. Open at Rochester, N.Y. who might not have got there otherwise.

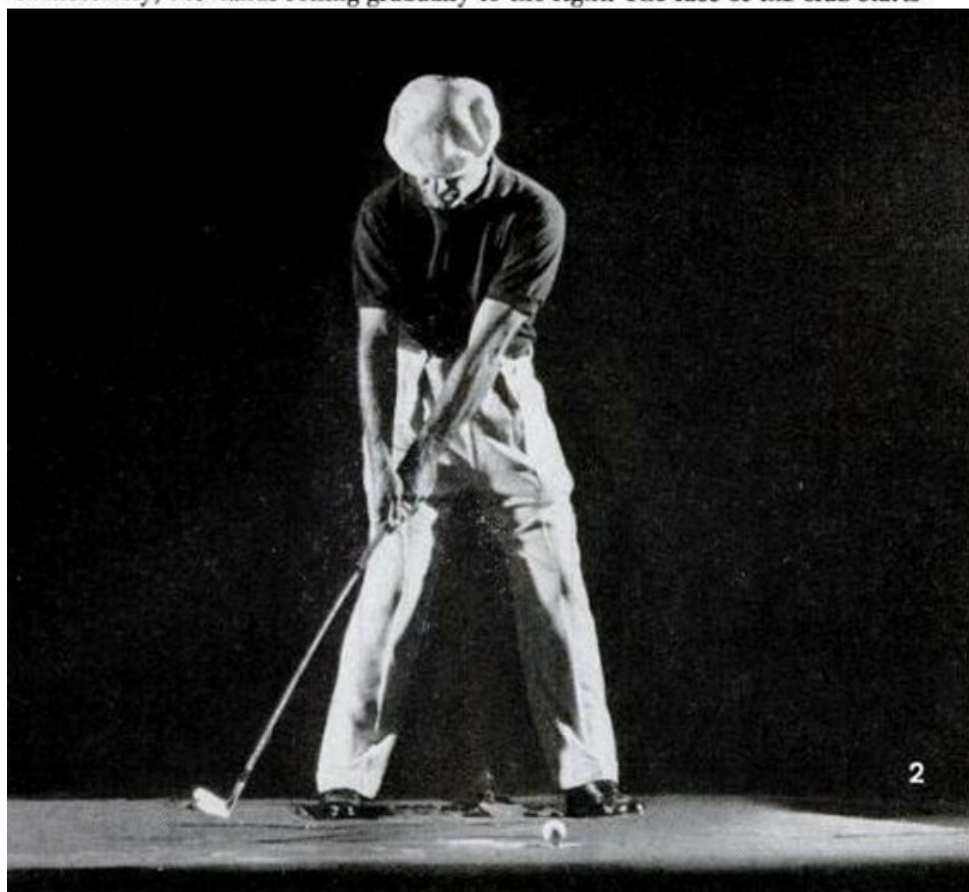
I expect to be there to see if anything new has been added.



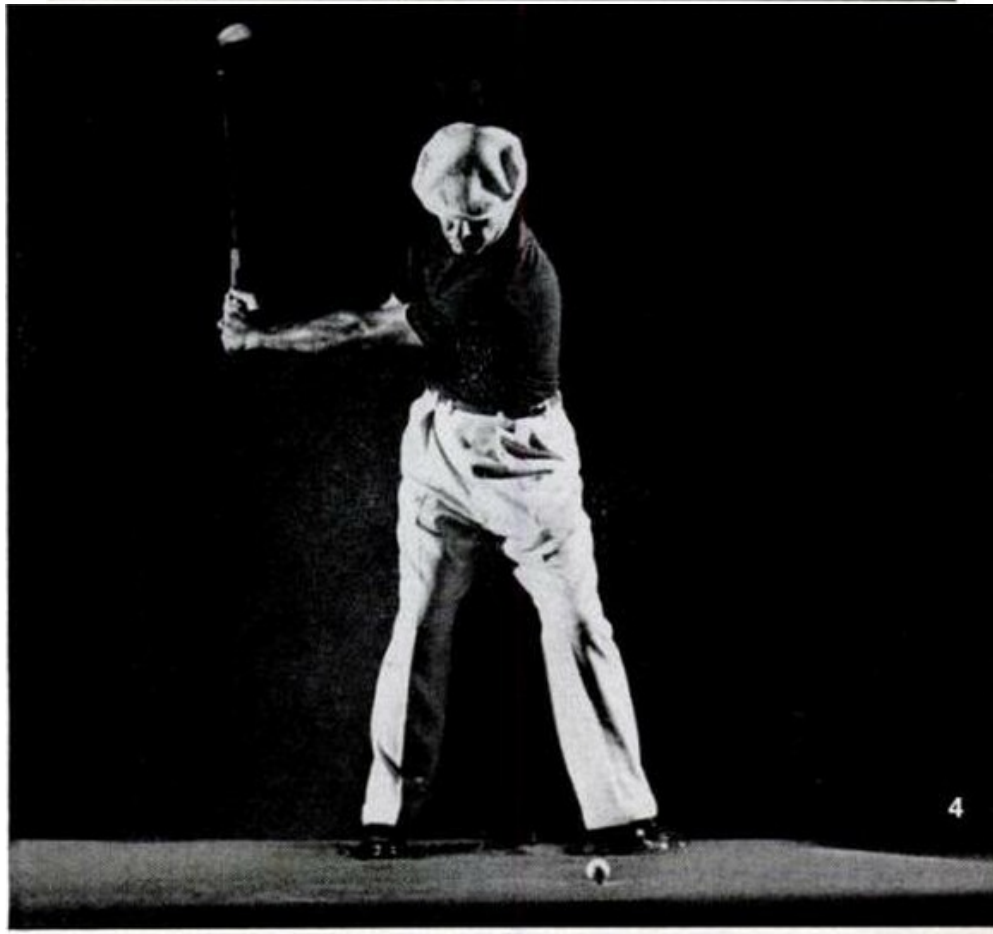
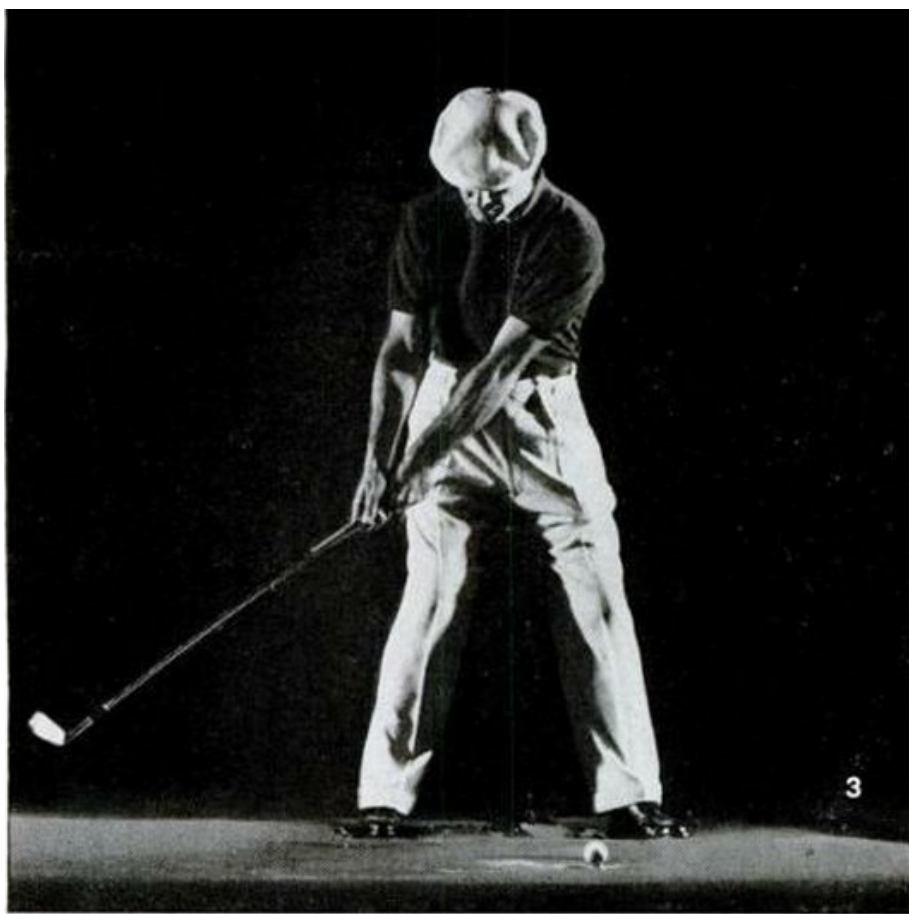
CHANGE OF GRIP called for shifting of the left hand and thumb from conventional position (*above, left*) to a place directly over the top of the shaft (*right*).

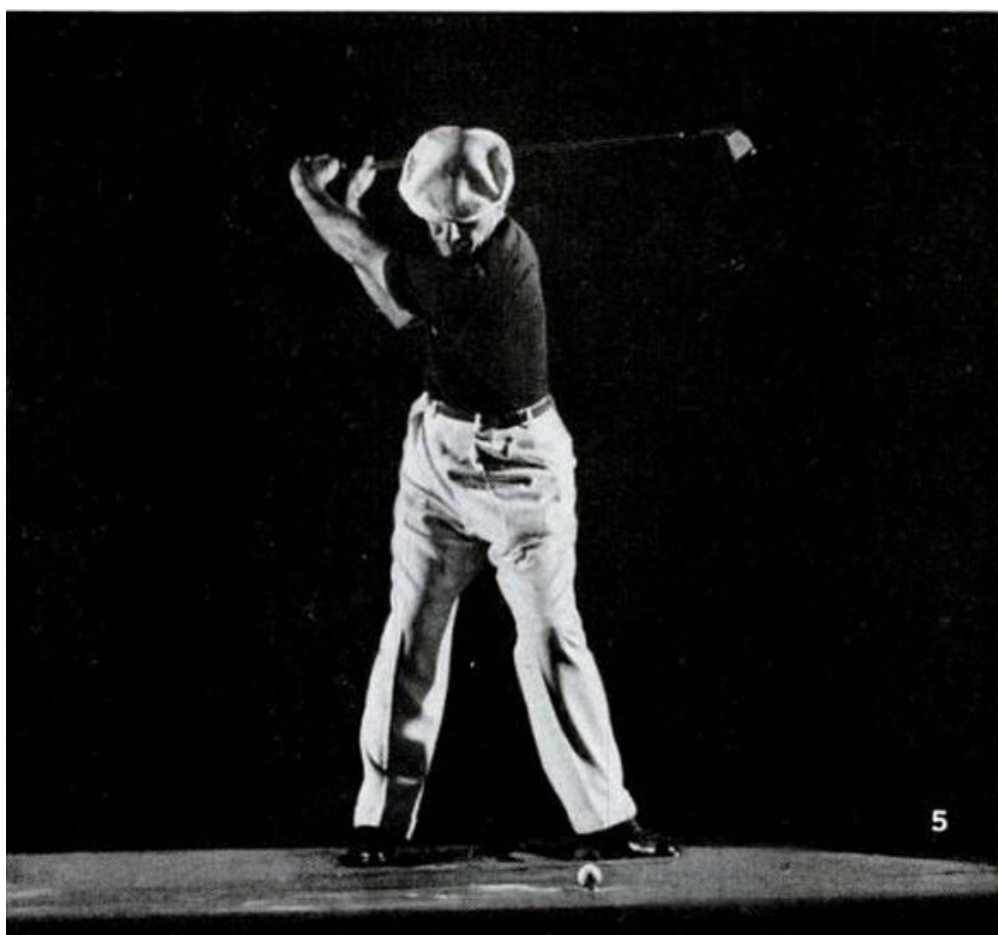


SETTING UP THE SECRET on the backswing, Hogan begins pronating almost immediately, the hands rolling gradually to the right. The face of the club starts

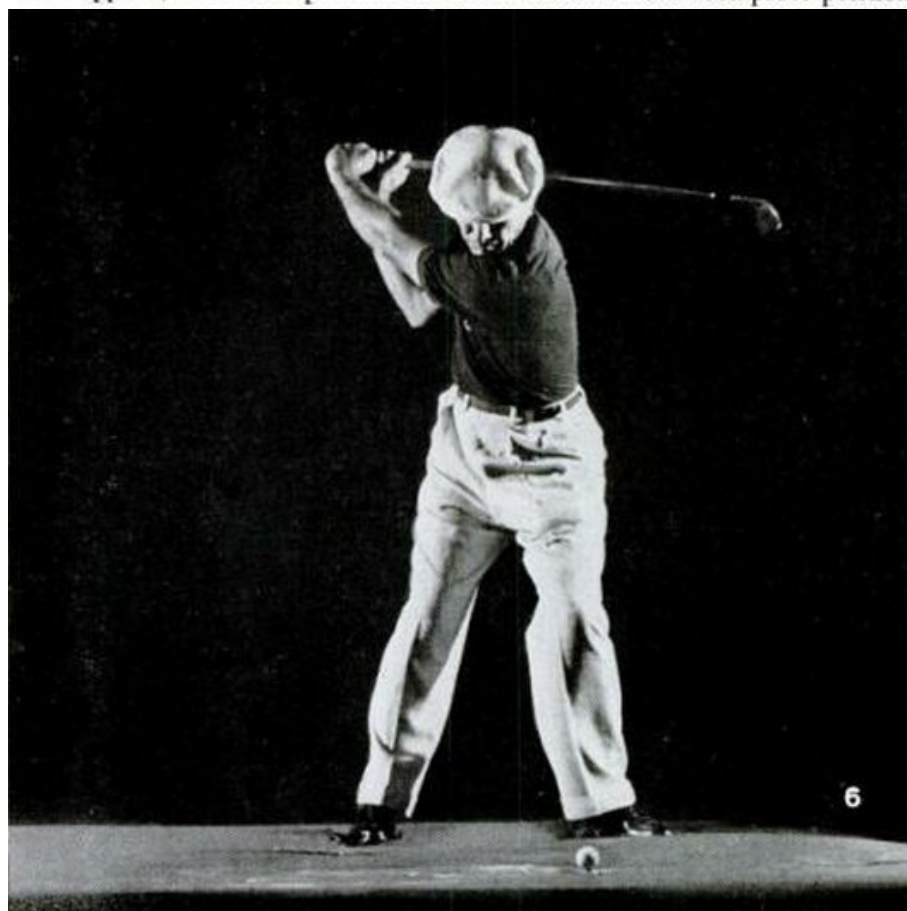


to open in picture 2 and continues to open (3) until backswing is two-thirds completed (4). At this point he begins bending his left wrist slightly backward

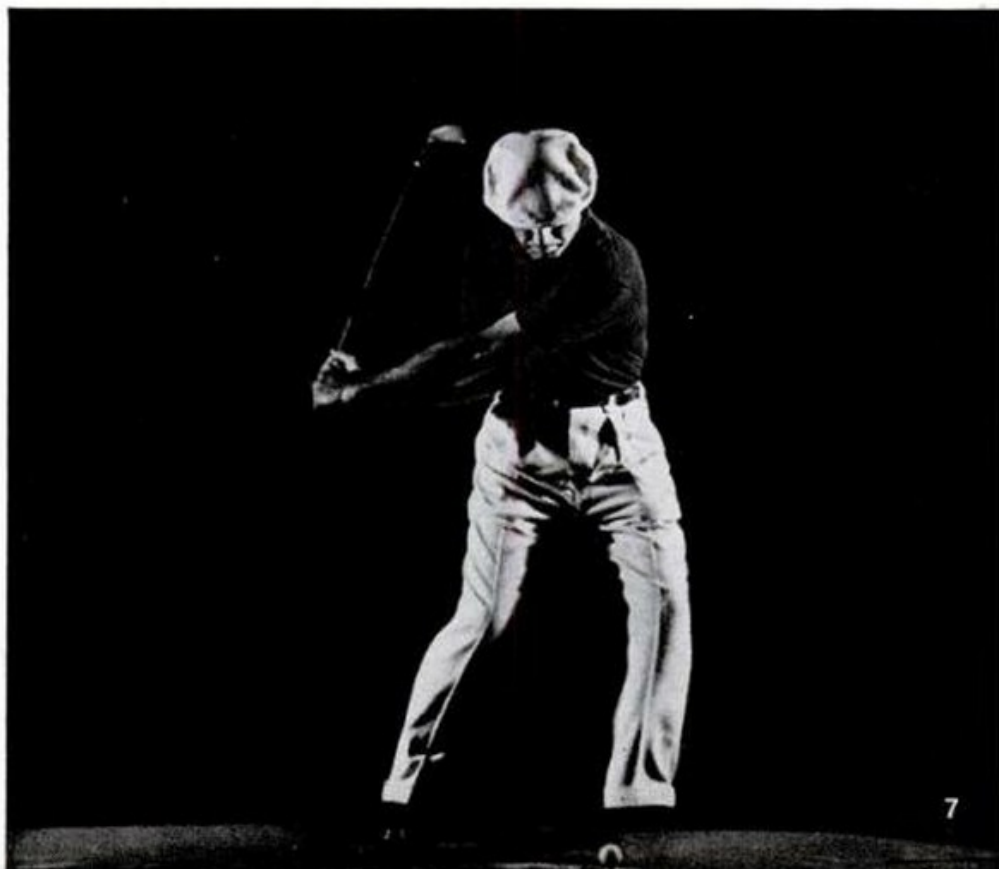




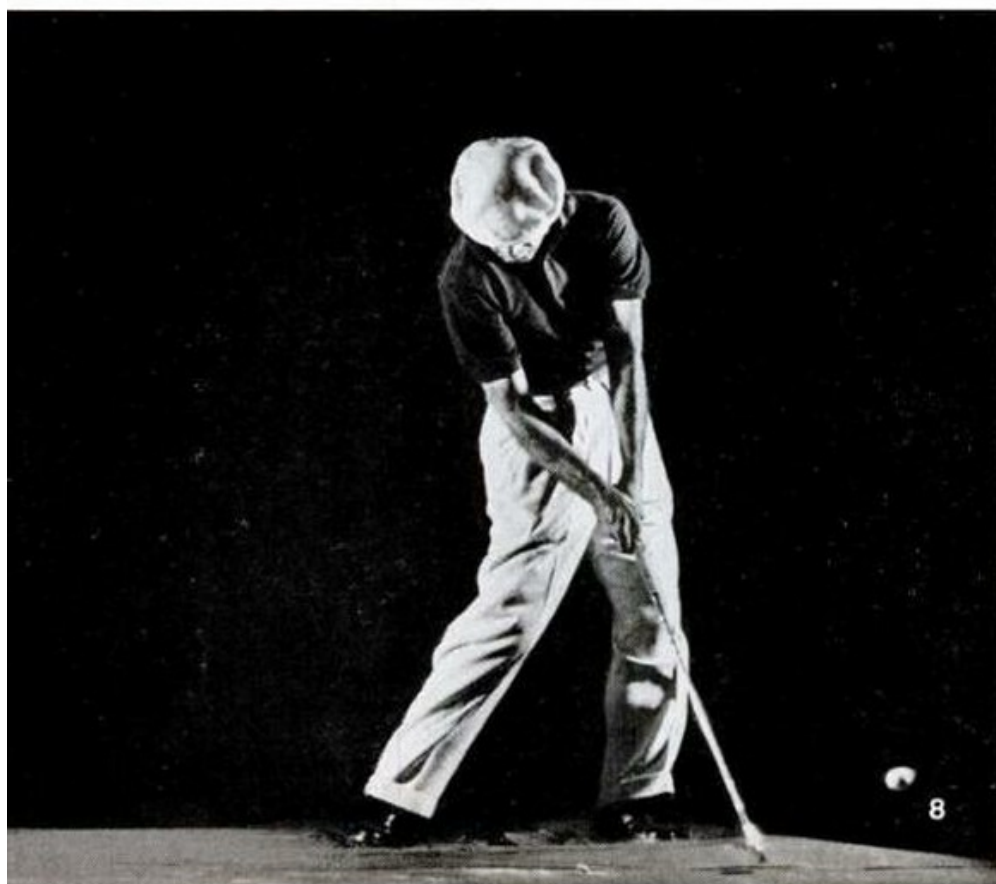
and inward (5) until it is cocked at the top of his swing (6). The secret has now been applied, club face open and the hands locked into a hook-proof position.



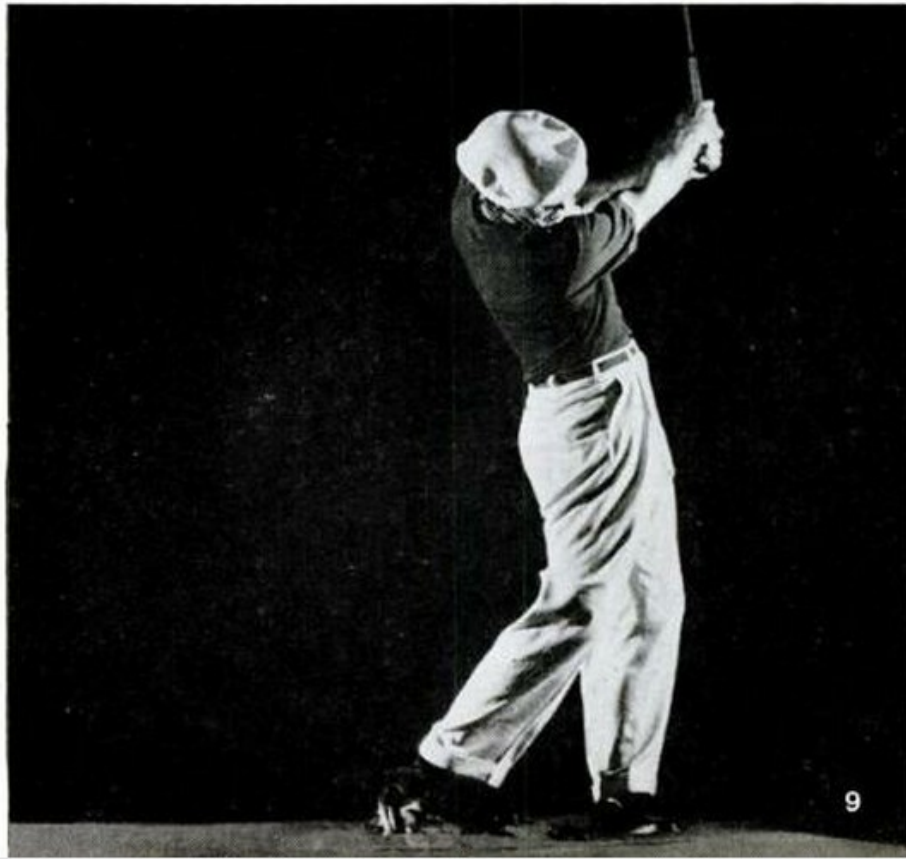
TURNING ON THE POWER in the downswing (*below*), Hogan uses the same old swing he has always used. His hands, still cocked on the way down (7), roll



back toward their original position as he smashes into the ball (8) but they never get quite all the way back. The face of the club is still slightly open as it



strikes the ball despite all his effort to close it. As he follows through (9), he has hit a controlled, tail-end fade to the right with no loss of distance whatsoever.



Compiled from August 8, 1955 edition of Life Magazine

Vol. 39, No. 6
ISSN 0024-3019

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