



HUGS & KISSES

Golf's big love affair

... by Fred Hawtree

Spring comes early in North Carolina. Hawtrees II and III were tramping the foothills of the Appalachians looking for that elusive formula which would locate 18 holes in exactly the right places. A sharp wind still blew off the snow higher up but the sun blunted its edge and four days of 12 miles a day seemed like no more than two. As a matter of fact, they really were two for H. Senior. He decided that enough damage had already been done at the halfway stage and left the younger division to get on with the tramping. A plan on the bonnet of the jeep needed a lot of static thought.

As you go farther south, Spring comes earlier still, until I suppose it disappears altogether, but for golfers at least it is heralded by the March tournament at Orlando which coincided with the Hawtrees' perambulations farther north. Thus on returning to Asheville's Grove Park Inn which has recently moved its 18th green to accommodate another 200 bedrooms and is currently adding another 200 somewhere near the 1st tees, we were able to catch up with a real day's golf on T.V. after one entirely imaginary.

The event was won by the elegant Payne Stewart whose plus fours and cap I had first admired over here in the Open in 1985. Apart from a touch of tartan here and there (entirely justifiable with a surname like that) his conservative attire suggested an imperturbable, undemonstrative personality, a Bobby Locke indeed, and not so differently attired. Well that's how I saw him. How was he?

His final longish putt for a birdie to win would have been difficult enough at the best of times. When it went in, the spectators surrounding the 18th green were delighted. Mr. Stewart also seemed delighted. He stood on one leg, punched the air a few times in the approved fashion, then embraced his caddy very affectionately. The caddy too was clearly delighted at the prospect of a handsome cut from the winner's cheque.

The cameras next recorded the entrance of a new character on to the green. I took him to be P.S.'s manager. His obvious delight was no doubt enhanced by the prospect of an even bigger cut from the winnings. He and his protégé went into a big clinch with a certain amount of in-fighting, but no instructions to 'Break' that I could hear.

Prior to these demonstrations of mutual esteem, the cameras had been picking out a lady in the crowd and recording any visible evidence of her emotions at all critical times. I assumed that this was Mrs. P. Stewart, although she only came No. 3 in the pecking order, and that the child in her arms was Miss P. Stewart, No. 4

Little Precocia (not, I imagine, her real name) got in the way of the full marital embrace which viewers like to see but they got it sorted out eventually and Little Miss P. was transferred to the victor's strong left arm. She too seemed not entirely displeased, though her cut was unlikely to make a dent in Dad's new balance at the bank.

If the T.V. cameras had been at Hoylake in 1913 J. H. Taylor would have had to embrace seven 'tinies', one by one.

After a short interview with Arnold Palmer, who mercifully refrained from close contact, another NBC commentator took over the show while an official brought on a cheque measuring about 6 feet by 3 feet and made of wood (not rubber) with 'Payne Stewart' already inscribed in handsome italics as the payee. Lumbered as he was with Little Precocia on one arm, the winner had difficulty in adding this piece of plywood to his impedimenta and stood up against his right leg as the interviewer began his routine interrogation

'How did you feel when....?'
'When did you first think perhaps you....?'
'What about that recovery from the trees at....?'
'That must have been a bad moment when you...?'

While answering these questions Mr. Stewart was, not unnaturally, trying to get a firmer grip on the cheque and even tried abortively to hoist it up under his disengaged arm. The microphone was held out at full stretch to get past the cheque and Little Precocia who was getting bored, took a fancy to the sponge rubber ball on the top of it. So the routine questions to her father were interspersed with asides to her:-

'Just a moment, darling, you'll get your turn....?'
'Now just wait till Daddy has finished sweetheart....?'
'Just be a good little girlie will you....?'
'O.K. honey. You can have it when we've finished....?'

And she persevered until she did get it, whereupon her interest evaporated.

I fell to thinking what would have happened if the TV cameras had been at Hoylake in 1913 when J. H. Taylor won his fifth Open. Mrs. Taylor would have been pretty sharp with the interviewer if he had tried to investigate her personal feelings. Then, one by one, J. H. would have had to hoist up about seven tinies each with an individual embrace to maximise the emotional impact. But what would the great man have had to say himself? And how big would the cheque have been? While you ponder these weighty matters I will press on.

When did all this embracing begin? No event is now complete without a big hug. No television serial is complete without frequent variations on a theme where father embraces son and they vigorously pat each other's back while the following laudable sentiments are expressed.

Dad: 'I love you son'
Son: 'I love you too, Daddy'

The principal variation on this dialogue takes a some what different form.

Son: 'I love you Daddy'
Dad: 'I love you too, Son'

On the whole the second one always seems to play better but I cannot for the life of me think

why. In fact I cannot think why they have to do it at all.

I first came across the big hug in El Salvador in 1954. I had gone out there to design a new 9 holes for the Country Club which was moving out of town (the first of many elsewhere) to allow development on its existing urban site. Ed Fox was their professional. He had been engaged at Northwood in Middlesex when he met his wife St. John and they went out to Central America, after the war.

Ed had always enjoyed company and conviviality. For example he never knew where he was when his unit was stationed on the South Coast before leaving on D-Day. He swore this was because they had taken all the signposts down. Even so....

When I met him in San Salvador, the local brewery was running a promotional stunt much to his liking. Inside a certain number of bottle tops was printed a red heart. A certain number of hearts or 'corazones' brought you a cash prize. To find the heart you needed to prise the cork disc from the metal top.

Ed regularly complained of feeling dehydrated in the Central American climate and his corrections of this dangerous condition placed him among the leading qualifiers for the top prizes. The climate was sultry, the sun remorseless and there was a revolution every four weeks. Ed maintained that these fortunately coincided with the rain storms which built up like radical passions in the dry periods. When it rained, everybody went indoors until the revolution was over. Alas this happy arrangement seems to have been abandoned.

A keen observer of the local scene, Ed had also picked out the 'embrasso' which had presumably come from Spain with Christopher Columbus. This form of greeting between old chums involved circling the shoulder of the opposite number with the arm not engaged in shaking his hand and warmly beating the dust out of the back of his jacket while uttering cries of delight at your good fortune in coming across him. It is also used when parting, but with heart rending howls of regret.

Ed had a wonderful gurgling laugh and could perform both welcoming and parting embrassos to perfection, give or take a certain artistic licence. When we parted at the airport after a detailed examination of a certain number of bottle tops, our own embrasso actually out-shone the tragic scenes being enacted at the departure gate by much closer acquaintances.

Then, damn it, I forgot about it when he came to England, as he often did during the winter to visit his mother and frighten the moths out of his overcoat which she kept for him. Far worse, on a later occasion I never got the

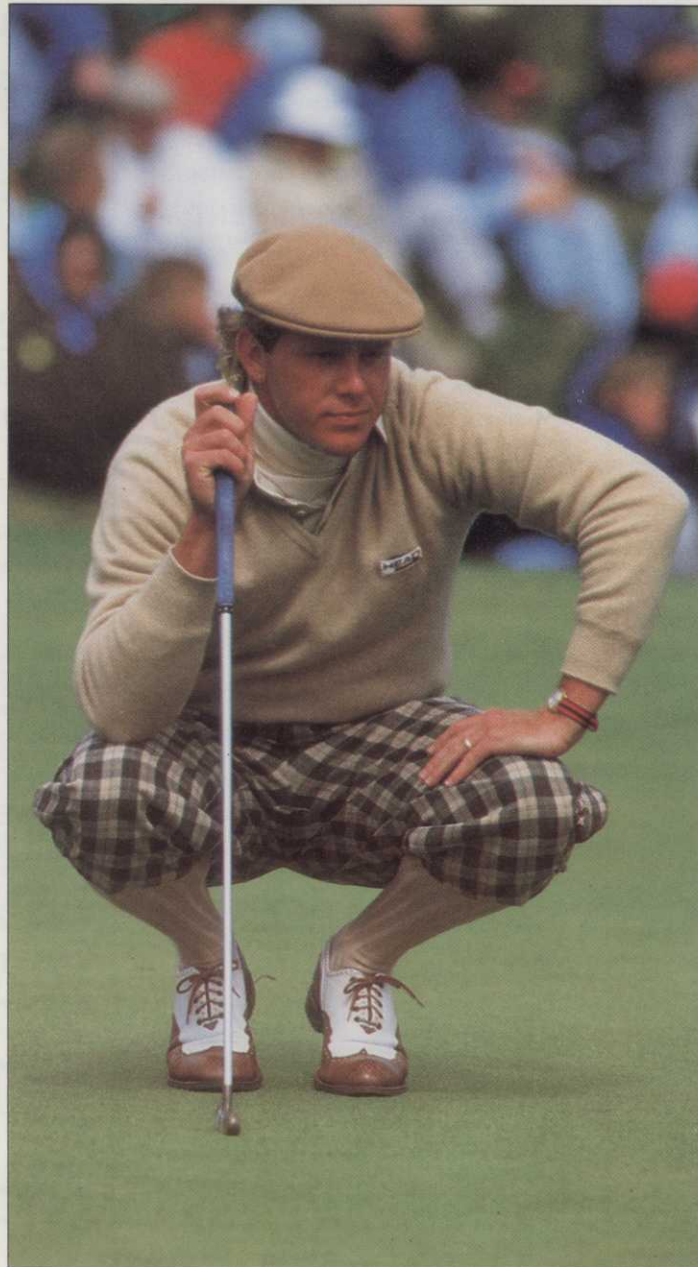
Payne Stewart

message when he telephoned my office from hospital in London. I only found out about six months afterwards. When the woman responsible walked out on her husband, her son, and on the job, I found the note. But by then it was too late. Sorry, Ed.

Now clearly the embrasso has crept north from the Mexican border just as the kissing of all and sundry has crept across the English Channel. There was a time when the bestowal by French generals of military decorations with appropriate facial contact, raised a tolerant smile north of Dover. At least we have not abandoned our natural reserve in that respect. But in social affairs, the polite or 'air' kiss has progressively invaded normal civil contacts. More has been brought back from those Spanish and French holidays than the odd bottle of Fundador or Pernod. Memories of carefree sunny leisure at the pool-side are perhaps revived by acting the part of the natives and giving evidence of international social graces.

In the United States a continuation of these changes has led to a greatly enhanced warmth in greeting old friends. I noticed on the Spring trip mentioned earlier that some of the ladies whom in my advanced years I felt able to kiss lightly in the air space just forward of their left ear (or should it be the right ear, I am never very sure) were now clasping me tightly in an embrasso of which Ed Fox would certainly have approved. I am not vain enough to imagine that this is due to any improvement in my general appearance in the three years elapsed since we had last met. Indeed in some respects, my 1987 model verges on the portly and makes a close embrace just that much more tricky.

It is not only outside the Latin countries that greetings and farewells have become even more cordial and demonstrative. Even as late as the sixties, my early relations with the French were still formal and always correct. One never used a Christian name. Even a friend only addressed another as 'Charlie' if they had been at school together and known each other at least thirty years since. That is all in the past. Last year I was invited to kiss my hostess, after no more than four years, and then reprimanded for leaving the job half done with just one cheek. Christian names are banded about as often as 'Monsieur' and 'Madame' formerly. Those who were never allowed to peck at all may now peck twice; family peck at least three times and watching a party of no more (I guess) than acquaintances, greeted each other yesterday at Cherbourg, everybody gave everybody else two lefts and two rights as a matter of course. Again one can



The elegant Payne Stewart, whose tartan plus fours have brought back to golf a reminiscence of Max Faulkner and Bobby Locke

only wonder - what next? As the Brits start to peck in earnest, the originators redouble their efforts in order to keep at least two pecks ahead.

One grand-daughter recently in Normandy reported up to four busks, two on each cheek, but the precise number was unpredictable, she said she simply had to remain on her toes ready for any number.

Another grand-daughter currently in Stuttgart with a family where both Mr and Mrs are pastors, reports nil significant Teutonic osculations but makes no diagnosis of the causes.

I have always held aloof from the embrasso after the débâcle

of my second meeting with Ed Fox. Unless it is an inborn and automatic habit as in Spain, it becomes necessary to run a card index listing those whom you normally pat on the back and those whom you don't. I was once surprised into initiating an embrasso with the President of a Spanish Golf Club when I came across him unexpectedly in the locker room at San Cugat. Not being too sure who he was, outside his normal environment but realising that something more cordial than a handshake might be expected, I snapped into the full works in line with Ed Fox's Mark I, (Meeting at airport after long separation).

I have to admit that after recovering his composure he seemed very pleased and in fact referred happily to the occasion to a friend in my hearing some months later. But it had obviously shaken him for it to stand out like that in his memory. I wished I had been in full charge of events when it happened.

There was another occasion in Dublin after a particularly good dinner at Malahide when I was misguided enough to join in the fond farewells between old acquaintances and found myself giving the one/two to a lady I had only just met. I wish I hadn't done that either but that is precisely the trouble, once you start, where does it end? And is it all as genuine as we think? Let's go back to Payne Stewart.

To his great credit he looked thoroughly uncomfortable throughout the performance I have detailed. His initial display of jubilation must have come naturally, the rest of the programme, I suspect, was elaborately prepared by the N.B.C. Team, once he was clearly a possible winner. How else would the cameras be picking out his wife repeatedly in the crowd? How come that Little Precocia was on hand so nattyly attired. She should have been getting into bed after a last prayer for Dad's birdie putts. And what comes next? The hero's parents? His grandparents? More distant relatives with a few anecdotes about his early childhood..the little scamp?

I am pretty sure it was rehearsed because a month later when Larry Hogan Mize hit his second shot to the 74th Hole 50 yards wide of the green, thus ensuring that he would win the Masters on this supposedly well-contrived test of golf, Mrs. Mize only appeared once and that was long after he had done his leap into the air and taken several running jumps, (though not at himself) with other acrobatics made up on the spur of the moment.

And while we were at Augusta National do you remember last year when J. Nicklaus holed all those putts including the one that counted. What could be more natural than his embrace of his caddy since his own son was carrying his clubs? But can you imagine the conversation? I think I can. If you can't, go back to the beginning and start again.

FEATURE 2

NEXT MONTH

more on the 'K' file.