

Hogan on Business

by NICK ROMANO

Today, Ben Hogan is a businessman — an asset to the golf industry.

Among the game's all-time greats, he recently spent a morning in his Fort Worth, Texas, office talking about the business of running his own golf equipment company.

"Golf is a great business," he said. "But there is a lot more to do yet. More people are playing now than ever. People play for health and enjoyment. Some are competitive, some aren't. People keep striving for improvement."

The same can be said for Hogan. Since retirement from full-time tour golf in 1960, he has channeled his efforts into the business side of golf and is involved in several facets of the industry.

At 62, Hogan's interest as head of the AMF/Ben Hogan Company is providing new innovations in club design. He has developed 21 models since the firm began business in 1953.

Hogan is as much a reflection of Fort Worth, as it is of him. Just miles away from Dallas, Fort Worth is a modest, mild-mannered city of some 394,000, that seems to enjoy being set apart from the hustle of the Big D, to the east.

Beyond the downtown area, the Hogan Company is situated over 10 acres of one of the city's industrial parks. Squeezed in between two older buildings, lies the main office of the plant and Hogan, himself.

"We're a long way from perfection in this business. Equipment is

improving every day, through advancing manufacturing techniques. We're putting out better merchandise, because of this," Hogan added.

It's ironic, but after you talk to Hogan for a time, you realize with so many people wanting to know what he thinks, Ben Hogan doesn't consider his opinions all that important to the industry. He is thoughtful in his answers, but modest and humble in his approach — unawed by his own reputation.

Hogan explains that the process of club design is long and involved. If something doesn't feel right to him, it never reaches the market. "I guess, if I ever had a goal to strive for in this business, it's that I could really contribute something to the game," he said.

There are still stories at the plant about how Hogan once threw out \$150,000 worth of clubs, because he didn't feel the quality was right. He is firm in the belief that nothing carries his name he is not proud to have it on.

From time to time, he gets letters from customers concerning his products and tries to scrutinize suggestions, both praise or complaints, which there are usually few.

"I think we have a quality line and that helps us sell. Along with that, we have a dedicated sales force, but like any business, there are peaks and valleys," Hogan remarked.

Ben Hogan believes in the club pro concept. "I don't think I have the expertise to advise pros on how to run their business," he says, "but,

I remember when I was a club pro, I tried to operate a good business. One of the most important things a pro has to do is to evaluate his membership. You have to tailor your operation to fit them."

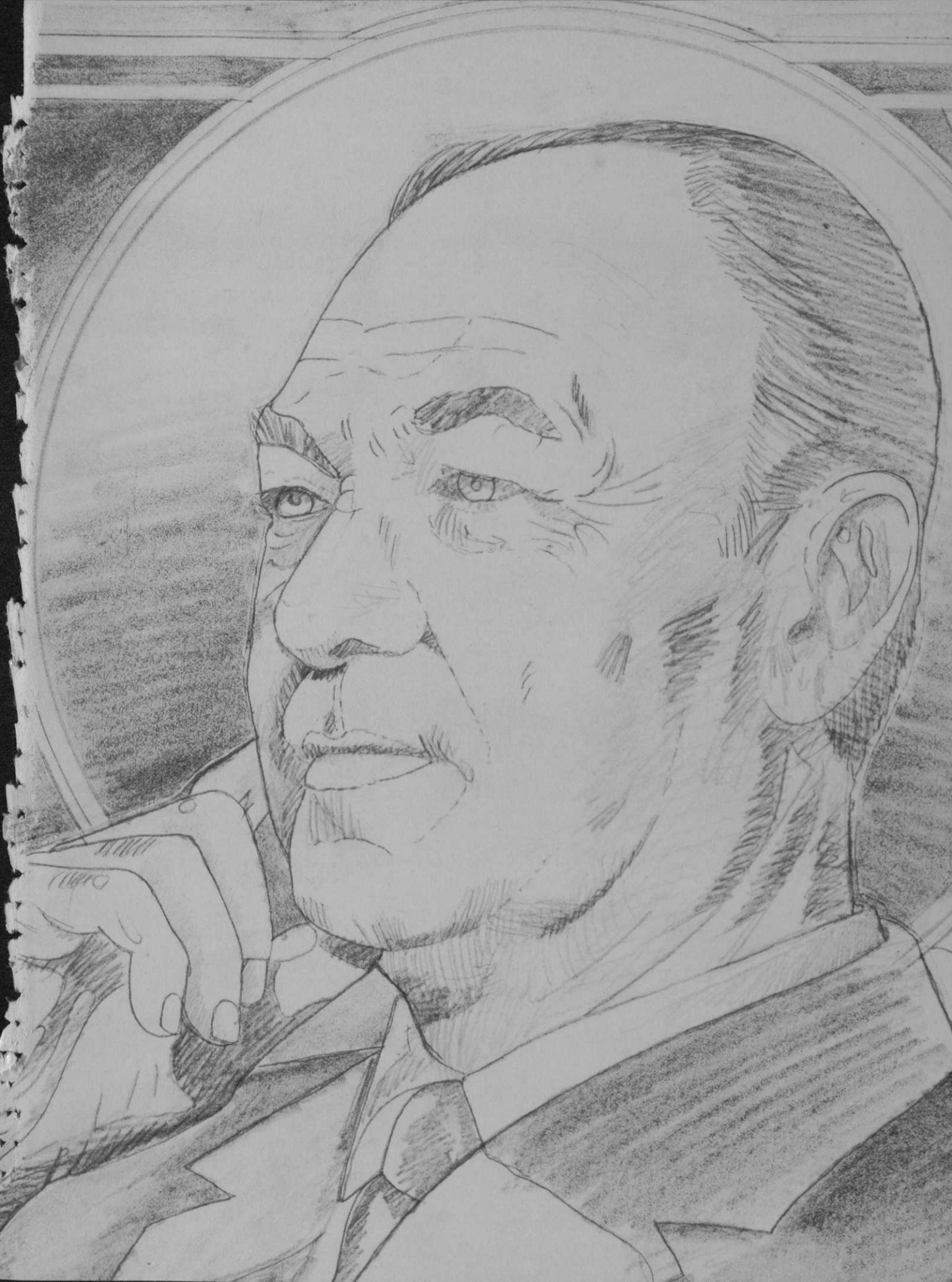
If there is a sure road to success for a pro, Hogan believes it is in always selling quality merchandise. "It isn't worth it to sell less expensive merchandise. Further, lesser merchandise nets smaller profits," he said.

Asked about the current number of legal battles to strip the exclusivity away from pros selling pro-line clubs, Hogan immediately backed his company's policy. "We won the suit in New Orleans. We dropped out of that case, because there was no case against us."

On the future of the pro-only policy being changed by a legal decision, Hogan is clear. "If they pass a law saying we have to sell our clubs to people other than the pros, I guess we'll have to do it. Until then, I'll just wait and do what we've always done."

If litigation ultimately involves the pro shops, Hogan thinks it will adversely affect the game. "Taking pro-only clubs away from pro shops will damage the competition of the market and hinder golf."

Commenting on the tight money situation facing many pros right now, Hogan explains that this situation isn't a new one. "Those problems have been going on for as long as I can remember. I suppose there will always be some pros that are in trouble. It happens in every





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business. Today though, pros are getting much better at paying their bills on time.”

Intelligent solutions are the answers Hogan offers today’s pro in keeping out of the red.

“A lot of businesses are under-financed. A lot of small businesses are in trouble. A lot of pros are in trouble. The remedy is to carry less inventory. Buy things that move. There’s enough business history to back that up,” he points out.

While still a touring pro, Hogan realized that he would one day turn to the business side of the game. “I knew that I’d get old someday. This business looked good, because it seemed that I knew something about it.”

Since becoming involved with his equipment company, Hogan has been an active overseer. He is no figurehead. When AMF purchased the Hogan Company in 1960, part of the agreement was that the name of the company and its principal namesake would continue.

If any group is happy about the arrangement, it is his employees. Touring the plant with a company public relations man, one sees dedication in the work. Hogan, himself, has trained a lot of people that now work on his assembly line.

Quality of the finished product is the prime goal at the Hogan plant. Numerous inspections are made before anything leaves for the

marketplace. This may slow production, but assures a demand for the Hogan lines. AMF’s annual corporate report for 1974, showed that the Hogan Company celebrated its best year ever.

Hogan’s business interests in golf extend beyond equipment. He is involved in course architecture and construction. He is currently involved in a course being constructed near the Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport. Called the Trophy Club, the project’s chief designer is architect Joe Lee, but Hogan himself will have a lot of input in the complete result.

“I always wanted to find a good piece of land and build a course that should be played. People should enjoy playing it. There will be no blind shots on this course. When you design a course, it should be built to allow for the greatest enjoyment. You build with that thought in mind. Each hole should be different and need to be negotiated differently.”

“Courses should be built for enjoyment. Anybody can make a course impossible to play. A course should be constructed with framed fairways, bunkers and ample-sized greens. There has to be character in each hole,” Hogan said.

There will be 36 holes full of character at the Trophy Club and Hogan feels that’s the only way to build a course. “There has to be that

many, at least, because a course with only 18 holes more easily lends itself to slow play,” he said. “I realize, there is a slow play problem right now. I don’t have solutions for it, although, a lot of the problems may be a matter of management.”

He described how two Texas pros are now handling over 600 people a day on weekends on a 36-hole course. He was sure slow play can be dealt with. “There are people in this world that don’t mind waiting. Take Japan for instance, there are people there waiting two months just to get a tee time. If you miss, you wait two more months. Japanese people play golf as a status symbol.”

Realizing there is a maintenance side to the course, too, Hogan wonders out loud about the escalating costs of country clubs. “As expenditures go up, the dues at courses go up. A lot of clubs are having a tough time right now. Even though it might cost more to play, I don’t think the game will suffer. People will continue to have recreation. Golf, skiing and tennis are continuing to expand,” Hogan said.

Ben Hogan as a player influenced two generations with the game of golf, and helped it to build a prominent niche in the life of America. As a member of the golf industry, he continues a pattern of influence which is helping make the business of golf a major one, important to the economy. □