

# I PLAY HUNCHES

By  
**GENE SARAZEN**

*As Told to Davis J. Walsh*

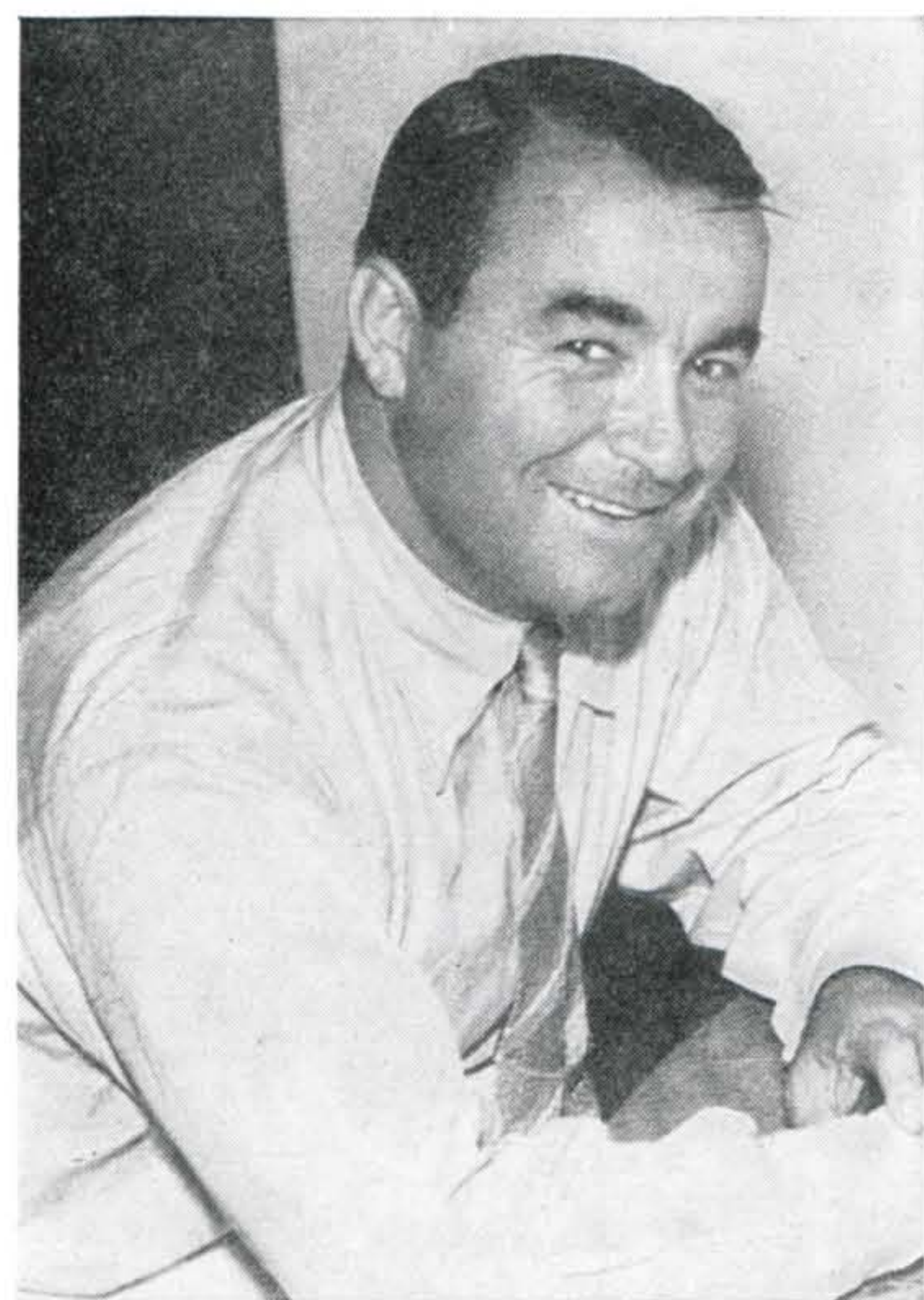
PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN FOR THE SATURDAY EVENING POST AT THE MARSHFIELD COUNTRY CLUB, MARSHFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS, BY JOSEPH JANNEY STEINMETZ

absently to myself: "How about a rudder on the back of my niblick?"

The result was a special niblick with a rear one-quarter of an inch lower than the front edge of the blade. In other words, it is designed with a rudder like an airplane, and its effect was amazing. I don't fear the traps now. I even seek them, as I did on two holes of the 1932 world's championship match with Francis Ouimet.

I mean that I played for the traps while Ouimet played for the pin, and I won both holes, as I fully expected to. I knew, you see, that the pins were not advantageously placed; that Ouimet's pitch shots wouldn't hold the green, but would roll over into the rough. And I knew that I could chip nearer to the cup from the sand than he or anybody else could from the grass.

Nobody knows it, but when I threw away the 1934 championship on the eleventh hole



THE doctor was almost doggedly cheerful about it all, but in spite of himself he shook his head. He had saved me. But for what? He didn't know and, naturally, neither did I. The only thing that seemed quite clear about this unusual recovery of mine was the verdict.

I was to get out in the open air and stay there, because I had had empyema and, if you get over that, you sometimes spend the rest of your life coughing discreetly against a handkerchief—provided you always have one.

As I recall those days, I nearly always didn't.

That's what made this prescription seem so bitterly ironic. Open air, to some, means brisk cantering along the bridle path at White Sulphur Springs, winter on the Riviera, summer at Bar Harbor and, altogether, living as the lizard lives, forever following the sun.

To us, the Sarazens, occupying an Italian-American cottage on the homely side of a New York suburb, it meant real sacrifice, perhaps privation. Sick or well, I had to work. We were decent, industrious and a respected people. But we were very poor.

The doctor understood. He knew, in effect, that he was giving me the choice of dying pretty rapidly at an office desk or starving at length in the open, but that's something I would be the last to hold against him.

His few brief words sounded, at the time, like a requiem. Actually, they were a reprieve.

Anyhow, instead of becoming a consumptive, I became a professional golfer.

## *A Mac Without a Tartan*

HEALTH followed almost immediately, prestige perhaps more guardedly, but by this time I feel that I have earned some degree of both. Anyhow, my complexion is neither tan nor ruddy, but something on the pale side of cordovan, and those who know me on the links or by newspaper photographs must concede that physically I'm as rugged as a railroad tie. I suppose this sounds as though I should add, "And I owe it all to empyema."

But it wasn't so simple as that.

Simple? The complications were terrific. So was racial prejudice. I even had to change my name to get a job. I called myself Gene MacSarazen, and doubtless the bones of my ancestors stirred fretfully in their shrouds.

Looking back now, sixteen years later, I wonder that I didn't come up sooner with a good, bright hunch I could bring to bear on a situation like that. But I was only a somewhat bewildered boy of seventeen and couldn't know that as time went on I was to follow my hunches with a blind, unquestioning faith that never for a moment bargained with destiny.

Golf writers have spoken of my calm and concentration in moments of stress. They seem to believe that I feel no doubt of the issue, and really I don't—when I'm playing hunches. That's where I get my well-publicized confidence, and why not? No hunch has betrayed me yet, whether it came in shooting the last four holes in three strokes under par to win \$10,000 at Agua Caliente or in becoming the only professional ever to win the American and British championships the same year. Both performances represented very pronounced hunches.

So did the holing of that 230-yard spoon shot for a double-eagle 2 that won me the Masters' championship at Augusta last winter by wiping out Craig Wood's three-stroke lead with one swift, sure blow. It was made possible by a hunch I had had about a special club for playing downhill lies. The shot couldn't have been made without it, just as my more recent championships might have eluded me if I hadn't cured my extreme fear of traps with a hunch I got on a flying field.

## *Playing for the Traps Instead of the Pin*

FOR years I had been afflicted with that dread malady of the links which, for lack of a better term, I call "trap phobia." It's a virulent plague that strikes at the hearts of men and turns them to stone. They become deathly afraid of traps, so, invariably, they pitch into them somewhat after the manner of the bird that doesn't like the cat, but is charmed down out of the tree by the fascination of its own fear.

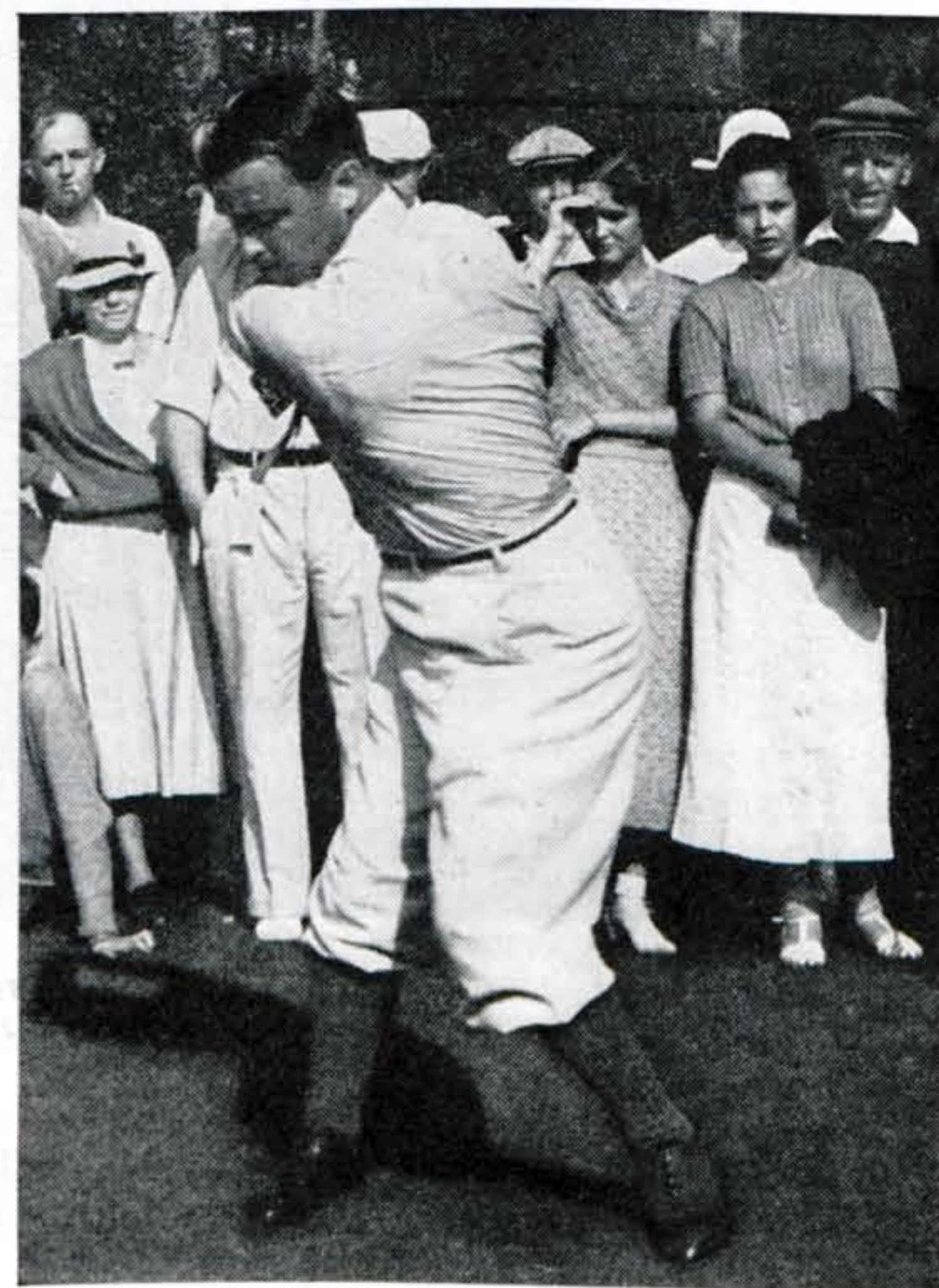
Anyhow, nearly every championship is decided in and out of traps, with the result that you either master your niblick before a title event or you might as well start back home and save the caddie fees. Personally, I wasn't able to save anything—neither fees nor strokes nor reputation.

I lived through some pretty desperate years that way, and then, suddenly, the answer came at a time and place when I wasn't thinking about golf at all. It was a hunch, a real hunch that made me a champion all over again, and literally it came on the wings of inspiration.

The scene is Roosevelt Field, Long Island, the year 1928; the principal character, a morose and dejected young man named Sarazen who was beginning to identify himself, even to himself, as the man who used to play golf.

Anyhow, I was idly watching the planes land and take off, without, as I say, the faintest thought of golf. And then, quite surprisingly, I was thinking of nothing else.

I had noticed that as the pilot started to take off he lowered the rudder to get the plane in flying position. And within a few moments I was murmuring



*The Author Starts a Drive With His Eye on the Ball and the Gallery's Eye on Him*



*Straight as an Arrow. Watching the Ball Fly Down the Fairway for a Birdie*



at Merion, I did it largely because I pitched for a trap and didn't make it. That seems incredible, but, after hooking into that ditch on the left and having to take a penalty stroke, I realized that a pitch to the green wouldn't hold from the position where I had dropped my penalty ball. There was a tree half stymieing me, and the safest course was to play for the trap at the right. I didn't make it—and lost a championship I should have won.

Moreover, the spectators were chattering like a lot of magpies up above my head as I was chipping out of a bunker at the final hole of the 1932 open championship at Fresh Meadow, but that didn't bother me in the slightest. I knew my niblick couldn't fail to lift the ball out close enough to the cup to go down in one putt, which is exactly what happened.

All told, I've had two memorable thrills out of golf, one long and one short. The latter came with that spoon shot at Augusta; the former, when I walked off the final green at Fresh Meadow in 1932

and knew that I had cashed the greatest three-way hunch a man ever had.

I wasn't even playing golf when the original inspiration came. I was on a fishing trip with Lester Rice, the golf writer, in a small bayou town in lower Louisiana during the winter of 1932, and we were just sitting around, thinking about practically nothing at all, when I picked up a paper, and there it was.

The Southern open championship was to be held at New Orleans the following week. Not a very vital disclosure to some, perhaps, but, to me, it presented a coincidence that smote right between the eyes. Ten years before, the Southern open had been held at New Orleans and, after winning it, I went on to two national championships.

"Tell you what," said I suddenly: "Suppose we pack up and go down there. If I lose, we'll forget about this. If I don't, I'll go after both the British and American open championships."

The point is that I didn't lose, and when the field of American entries headed for England I was among

them. So was another of my hunches, an extra-heavy practice club I had figured out after being around a lot with Gene Tunney some years before and noticing that he strengthened his hands by constantly squeezing a contraption he carried with him.

The heavy practice club could do even better than that, however. It did more than just strengthen the hands and wrists. By its very weight, it made good timing a formality.

Anyhow, this was to be a hunch upon a hunch. I knew, for instance, that we Americans needed at least ten days in England before we got the proper feel of our golf, this leaving us very little time for polishing.

"Why not," I thought, "try to eliminate that trial-and-error period altogether? Why not spend two hours a day on shipboard just swinging the practice club and see what happens?"

And what happened was this: The day I landed, I got a call from S. L. Rothafel, better known as Roxy, impresario of stage and radio. He wanted to play golf, so out we went to Stoke Poges, and I shot a sixty-nine, sea legs and all. I felt then that my destiny was definitely shaping itself.

When the championship itself started, at Sandwich, I knew it was. In his own mind, Gene Sarazen was always the winner of this tournament from the moment he hit his first tee shot, and when they posted the final returns he had an all-time championship record for both sides of the ocean: a total of 283 for seventy-two holes.

By that time, the thing had ceased to be a belief and became a conviction. But it was to be further strengthened when I got back to Fresh Meadow a few weeks later for the American championship and remembered that Tommy Armour had beaten me with a long putt on this course in the final round of the P. G. A. event in 1930.

#### *Dressing Up for the Presentation*

PERHAPS that reasoning may seem a little askew, but, in my mind, the Armour incident settled everything. It was to be my turn now. And if you think I didn't have a wholesome belief in this, let me commend you to the final morning of the championship and just exactly what I said and did before going out for the two rounds that inevitably win and lose every title.

I was five strokes back of the leader, Jose Jurado, the Argentine, who had a thirty-six total of 145. I had played indifferent golf for the first two days; largely, I think, because I hadn't quite recovered from the ocean voyage and the round of receptions and banquets given in my honor.

But I said to Thomas Meighan, well-known actor and my close personal friend:

"I won't take worse than a 70 in either round today. This is my championship."

Then I went upstairs to the dresser and got out my favorite necktie, after which I said to Mrs. Sarazen:

"How about my presentation clothes? I'm going to need them today."

It was a suit I kept for state occasions. I wanted to look nice, you see, when they presented me with the cup at the end of the day.

It turned out that I was right about everything, with one exception. I didn't finish with two 70's. It was a 70 and a 66.

Almost literally, then, I've hitched my wagon to a hunch, and it has carried me to two world's, one British and four American championships, with the end hardly yet. But I seem to be getting away ahead of my story, which properly begins the day I played my first hunch on George Sparling at the Brooklawn Country Club at Bridgeport, Connecticut, and became, for the first and only time in my life, a Scotch professional.

"MacSarazen, eh?" says George, kind of rolling the name over his tongue. "I guess ye'll do for polishing clubs."

So Sarazen, the fairly well skilled laborer who had worked for the Remington Arms Company at Bridgeport and helped build the Army barracks at Yaphank, Long Island, became MacSarazen, the golfer, and he has never regretted the decision. I had been a caddie at the Apawamis Club, Rye, New York, in 1913, and,

(Continued on Page 65)



*Sarazen, Looking Down Course, Chooses the Correct Club From His "Good Luck" Caddie*



*What Gene Sarazen Calls the Most Difficult Stroke in Golf, Where the Ball Lies on the Upside of the Sand Trap Almost Under the Grass Ledge*



# I PLAY HUNCHES

(Continued from Page 15)

naturally, had developed a golf swing practicing with members' clubs, as all caddies do and seemingly must.

Before I can reasonably drop the hunch situation entirely, mention should be made of the Miami and Agua Caliente opens of 1931, the latter representing more money than a golfer ever has won in any other single tournament.

Once again I was at something of a loose end, just loafing around Miami on a vacation with Tom Meighan and Leon Errol. I hadn't intended to play in the Miami open, for I'm not one to go on a busman's holiday. When I'm not playing in a tournament, I often don't see a golf course for weeks at a time.

As for playing both at Miami and Agua Caliente in practically the same week, that seemed absurd. They were about 3000 miles apart and nothing could be more prohibitive than the expense. The expense? I was suddenly very excited. I was having, in a word, a hunch.

Briefly, I'd pay for one with the purse from the other. The Miami open had a first prize of \$1000; the Agua Caliente open was to pay \$10,000 to the winner, the greatest purse ever offered, before or since. Anyhow, my mind was made up. I was going to win \$1000 and then send it after ten.

Knowing by that time that my hunches never fail, I wasn't surprised when I won the \$1000. That, I felt, was only the first part of my liaison with destiny.

The matter, I felt, was ordained. I was spending one to get ten—spending it on airplane travel, hotels, country-club tabs and all the other factors that conspire to make certain that professional golfers must die poor.

But I never doubted the logic of the investment. Arriving the day before the tournament and walking over the course, I doubted it even less. Every shot I was to make for four rounds seemed so clear. I'd drive here, then pitch there. The \$10,000, it seemed, was in the bag—my bag. I was still feeling that way on the fifteenth tee of the final round, when the "grapevine" of the golf course, which always can be depended upon to inform the contender of the very worst about himself, brought me the bad news. All I had to do to win was to shoot birdies on three of the last four holes and a par on the other.

Well, I did it. Don't ask me how or why. I simply knew I would, and so I did. There may be those who see no value in the hunch system, and I have no quarrel with their point of view. All I ask is that they leave me mine. It has been a very good friend.



Back in the MacSarazen days at Brooklawn, I needed a friend, but I was more fortunate than the average. Almost overnight, I found myself with two. In the first place, I began shooting a lot of low rounds in practice, and a couple of the members, Archie and Willie Wheeler, did the rest. They spread the legend that I was practically infallible in teaching and club making, with the result that members began flocking into the shop to ask me to tinker with erring shafts and club heads.

Maybe I did have something. Frankly, I don't know, because as soon as the member had taken himself off I was told: "Just put it in the rack, and when he comes back, hand it to him. All golfers are crazy."

But in spite of this singular attitude toward the whims of club members, the quality of my popularity wasn't particularly strained; although, in truth, I did some things around the club that I'm almost ashamed to admit. At that time my temper was inflammable and quite beyond control. A bad shot was something to drive me into a tantrum, with the result that my reputation for club throwing somewhat exceeded my prestige as a golfer. I recall, for instance, that I used a member's putter during one round of the course in which I missed all putts from three to thirty feet and was literally fit for an alienist.

The first thing I did was to head for the pro's shop. The next was to put the putter in a vise and saw it into sections. This sounds crazy as I tell it now, but it actually happened. The third thing was to leave the sawed-off sections in the member's locker. I later paid him for the club, but I hardly think he appreciated the spirit of the thing. It didn't seem to occur to me at the time that he might have cherished the club.

#### **A Bet on Which Both Won**

Anyhow, I was so boisterous around a golf course that everybody got a laugh when I was paired with Bobby Jones for the first two rounds of the national open championship at the Columbia Country Club, Washington, D. C., in 1921. They thought we would wind up in each other's beads, Bobby being quite a man for temperamental outbursts in those days.

The result was that we made a private bet, whereby each was to forfeit five dollars to the other every time he threw a club, and the funny thing was that not a dollar changed hands for the two days.

I don't know what this did for Jones, but it convinced me of one thing: If it was going to cost me money, I wasn't the man to lose my temper.

That was the beginning. The finish of Sarazen, the fanatic, came through my wife, Mary, and Walter Hagen, an arch-opponent of the years. Hagen and I have seemed to snarl at each other almost from the first, but, on my part, I have a real respect for him and hope he feels the same way about me.

First of all, however, my wife shamed me into a degree of decent behavior on a golf course by telling me how the gallery murmured inaudibly and then walked away in tacit disapproval after one of my periodic outbursts.

"Every time you get riled and show it," she said quietly, "you lose some friends. I know you're only mad at yourself. They don't. They think you're a bad sport."

That was almost enough, since I'm not insensible to the importance of the

men and women who pay for the show and thus make my living possible. It occurred to me, in fact, that I had as much privilege to step out of my part and rant at destiny as would an actor on the stage in suddenly abandoning his character and haranguing the audience. Hagen did the rest—by precept.

I have played many a round with him and don't mind conceding several points, including the fact that there is no great devotion between us. But in one respect I have to move well back and let him stand alone.

#### **The Four Greats of All Time**

As a golfer who can take the good with the bad, he's a positive standout. I've seen him get the worst breaks a man ever had and never for a moment betray the fact that he had noticed anything out of the ordinary. To one of Hagen's sublime self-faith, the alibi is simply not to be thought of, and so he goes his serenely indifferent way, head flung back with characteristic Hagen swank, leaving the squawk to those who are adept at dishing it out, but a bit backward about the art of taking it. You've simply got to like that part of him.

This may be regarded as a surprising tribute, coming as it does from a man who openly stated before the 1933 championship at Chicago that Hagen belonged in an armchair and who, in turn, had to accept the ignominy of a rather grim jest by Hagen before the end of the tournament. He waited, in fact, for the final round and the moral certainty that I was to get nowhere on those abominations known as the creeping-bent green.

Then he called a clubhouse attendant, gave him five dollars and a chair and told him to take the latter out to me on the fifteenth tee.

I have, however, a certain well-recognized honesty of opinion, and this forces me to say one more thing for Walter Hagen. In all the generation of great golfers since the beginning of the game, only four are marked for genius, and one of them is Hagen.

The others are Bobby Jones, Harry Vardon and Miss Joyce Wethered, the English girl who is now playing in America as a professional. You must concede them this ultra-distinction on the face of their records. And now I'm about to say another surprising thing:

It is my belief that, barring Miss Wethered, who was so far beyond her competition as to make of it a pale and insipid caricature, none of them could repeat these records if they had to start all over again today. Jones is no longer a keen golfer, as he proved in his appearances in the two Masters' events at Augusta, last year and this. Vardon has grown too old for serious tournament play.

But Hagen is still around, and it is my opinion that he is a better golfer today than he was when he was winning his two championships here and his four in England. Yet he can no longer win.

Why? Because modern golf, with its sets of matched irons and its watered courses and "club-member" greens, has become too standardized. It has reached a point where the championship figures to go to the man holing the longest putt, and, by the law of averages, a different man should do this practically every year.

I call them "club-member" greens because anybody can hold them, so heavily are they watered. In fact, a

first-rate golfer no longer uses back-spin on approach shots, but plays them for the green and lets them run to the pin. There are some few American courses that hold to the old tradition, notably Oakmont, Merion, Brae Burn and Brookline, but they are so vastly in the minority that you practically have to go to England for the nuances of iron play—the pitch to the pin, the pitch and run, the pitch with the drift to the right or the break to the left—seldom the same shot twice.

Now even that stronghold of conservatism seems to be passing. Anyhow, they have Americanized the course at Sandwich, with the result that neither the record 283 I scored there nor the record-equaling performance of Henry Cotton last year is as impressive as it sounds. For when Hagen won in 1928 with 292 and I finished second with 294, that was the first time 300 had been broken in the championship history of Sandwich—and golf hasn't improved that much in the meantime.

The fact is that the real par of the course was less than 70 most of the way last year. They had watered the fairways so lavishly that you could get greater distance in the rough; and the greens were so heavy they presented no problem. You just blazed away and let it go at that.

No, golf under these conditions can hardly look for a consistent winner, even if, as I say, Jones were to start all over again being the marvelous man he was between 1923 and 1930. With standardized equipment and the greens what they now are, I think he would find himself in there too many times trying to be the man to sink the longest putt.

#### **When the Jones Complex Was Rife**

At that, Jones undoubtedly had all of the pros buffaloed and might do it again. We were once so demoralized that I recall Hagen trying to be funny in the locker room between rounds of the 1930 open at Interlachen while Bobby was on his way to his famous grand slam.

"Somebody asked me how I went," said Walter, "and I just caught myself in time. I was going to tell him I played like an amateur. But I saw it wouldn't do. He'd never believe me."

"So what did you do?" asked a voice somewhere behind the cracked ice.

"I told him the truth." Hagen was making his exit. "I told him I played like a professional."

All of us had what I called the "Jones complex." We were forever stopping friends to ask, anxiously, "What's Jones doing?" and always our idea was to make the perfect shot, thinking for some reason that his were incapable of human error.

In other words, we helped to beat ourselves, although I'll have to add that he was as close to perfection as anything we've ever had on a golf course, and if he had been born ten years later and was starting on his career tomorrow, he would always be the man to beat.

It is, therefore, with no tentative feeling of relief that this statement is made:

Jones can never come back. I saw that all too clearly at Augusta this year. He has got heavier and doesn't pivot as well. He has lost distance, also accuracy—and not without very sound cause. Jones has found other things to amuse him, including hunting in season and the outdoor life of the South in general. He even plays tennis now.



Consequently, when Al Espinosa and myself played a practice round against Jones and Ed Dudley the day before the Masters' championship this year, I was frankly incredulous at the start, and later astonished.

Along about the seventh hole, in fact, Al and I began comparing a few notes, something like this:

Said I: "The old boy hasn't the same groove."

Said Al: "He isn't cocking his wrists the way he used to."

Said I: "If you stayed away for four or five years, you'd forget a few things too."

In any event, before that practice round was over, I had another of my comforting hunches. I shot a 65 that day, Jones a 76, and forthwith I knew two things: I had both Jones and the course beaten, so what more could I ask?

That's the way I felt about it even when I reached the now-famous fifteenth hole and found myself three strokes down to Wood with only four holes to play. Make no mistake, I proposed to wipe out those strokes during the remaining holes; instead, it wasn't necessary. I got them all back on one shot.

The reverberation hit the headlines and left them tingling for days. It was called the greatest shot ever made in a pinch; also some other things not quite so complimentary, there doubtless being an element of luck in holing a 230-yard shot from the fairway. But let me make two things clear:

First, even if I hadn't holed out, I feel that I would still have come through. Birdies were more than possible on at least two of the last three holes; whereas, I purposely took no chances, but played them for pars and a tie.

Second, I may not have been aiming for the cup from 230 yards. But I was aiming for the flag.

### ***The Fifteenth Hole at Augusta***

I had to. Only a perfect shot would do there. I had a 200-yard carry over water, and naturally I had to go for the green, with Wood three strokes ahead. Moreover, I found myself with a downhill lie, one of the toughest of fairway shots, but I still had a hunch up my sleeve or, rather, in the bag, to cover the situation.

That was my club especially designed to offset the effects of this awkward shot. Selecting this club, I stood slightly ahead of the ball and toed the club head in at address. Then, as I came down into the shot, I drew the face of the club slightly across the ball in order to get it high enough to carry the water. What else was I thinking of?

Somebody asked me that after the round, and the answer was simple enough.

"I was thinking of getting 230 yards," said I grimly. "And I got it exactly to the last inch. Lucky? Oh, yes; quite lucky. But it was a good shot, hit exactly the way I wanted to hit it."

The above description of the shot I made at Augusta shows, to me at least, the long way I've come since those brash, early days when I was eighteen, and thinking of any kind was practically taboo. I played in my first open championship then, the scene being the Inverness Club, Toledo, in 1920, and watching the great names of golf fade out, one by one, gave me a sense of potential power, which was augmented by the fact that I finished second in the qualifying round.

This convinced me that I could score with the big timers, and they ultimately proved that they were only human and could fail.

Vardon, the English master, started the last round four strokes ahead and finished one stroke behind. Chick Evans, too, missed the leading score of Big Ted Ray, the other Briton, by three strokes, while Hagen, Jock Hutchison, Jim Barnes and others had to admit defeat.

### ***The Hard-Luck Man of Golf***

Finally, the big American hope became another juvenile of the tournament, Leo Diegel, later to be labeled the "hard-luck man of golf." I stood in a window at St. Andrews and almost wept when he missed a three-foot putt for a tie with Denny Shute and Craig Wood in the British open. But that was thirteen years later—thirteen years of unrequited attempts to win either the British or American open.

Strangely, in this, his first championship, Diegel was closest of all. His chances looked so good that Evans went out to caddie for him and, unconsciously, brought about his downfall. I had an unconscious part in it, too; the blow-up being due to Diegel's nervous temperament. He was and still is impulsive; he hates to wait, so that when he reached the fourteenth tee and found the course tied up, he wanted to shoot anyhow. Evans counseled restraint, fearing a missed drive if Leo was conscious of shooting into the twosome ahead; one of the latter being me.

You see, there was a slow pair on the green and we were forced to stand idle for some minutes. But back on the tee, Diegel was like a caged animal.

"I can't drive that far," he kept insisting. "I know that kid out there. He's a long hitter."

Finally, when the way was clear, Leo stepped up to his ball in a dither and topped it so badly that he never rightly recovered. At that, he finished only one stroke back, being tied with Vardon and others for second place.

He's probably learned plenty in the meantime, but not so much as I have, for a very sufficient reason. I had more to learn than he did and, in a way, I was unfortunate in winning too quickly, never for a moment knowing how or why I won. That big year of 1922, therefore, was a bitter delusion.

It made me think that, with all of those years ahead of me, I would win and win and win until everybody, including myself, got all tired out. I figured, as a world's champion at twenty-one, to improve; instead, I got worse and stayed worse. At the showdown, you see, I found I had nothing to cultivate. All I had was confidence and a putter.

There were other things to consider besides getting my swing grooved and ridding myself of "trap phobia." There was Jones, for instance. He started to win, as it happened, just when I started to lose.

There isn't any sinister connection between the two, merely an idea that there had to be an answer for both of us. Not the answer of the perfect swing or the putting touch. A lot of golfers have both and still don't win. So I studied Jones as closely as a scientist studies a rare and valued specimen and, finally, I discovered one thing. When he was really in the throes of four good tournament rounds, Jones never took a 6 on any hole. I wondered at the time whether this had anything to do with his success.



Since then, I've found out—sometimes to my anguish—that the surmise was all too true. Could I only have avoided those sixes at Oakmont in the open championship of this year, what might have been the answer?

That, I'm afraid, is something for morbid minds to play with; a belief I'm sure Jones himself would be only too glad to share after his experience on the same course in 1927. The greatest golfer in the world at the time, he finished so far back that they almost had to go out and find him, as I felt sure they wanted to do with me this year. There were even times when I almost hoped they would.

I knew, for instance, that I would never get anywhere except behind the back fence on those greens, as hard as an onyx table and as deceptive as a bagatelle board. Anyhow, they required a nicer delicacy than I was able to muster, but the fact is that we all blew, including Henry Picard with five putts on one green and Charley Yates, the amateur, with four on another.

The result was that a dogged young man by the name of Sam Parks, Jr., finally was the winner.

We knew that Parks was good. But it was only after the most bizarre of all championships that we began to suspect that he might be great. I don't care about those 50,000 practice shots he was supposed to have played at Oakmont over a period of months. The real point is that anybody who wins the open championship on that course

must be great, or there just isn't any gauge for greatness.

After all, didn't Jones himself fail twice in four attempts there? The other time came in 1919, when he lost in the amateur final to S. Davidson Herron, significantly another home product who only occasionally had been heard of before and even more seldom since.

If this seems like an invidious comparison with Parks, please spare me that. I am not attempting to rule Sam out after this championship, but, in fact, am conceding that anybody who won this one might go on indefinitely. It was like putting down a drainpipe. The ball just would not stop, yet Parks took only thirty putts on his final round and less than that for the round before, which, on any man's greens, is shooting under pressure. I guess, if the truth were told, the rest of us just didn't have it.

This has little to do with hunches, but the fact is that I had none to cover Oakmont and was even timorous about the result many days before the championship began. I hate to be the favorite.

What I want is to start out on the final round with a fighting chance and everybody saying:

"Too bad, Gene. You gave them all you had, but it looks like you're licked."

That, for me, boils the eggs. But if everybody is conceding you a win before you start, they're boiled in advance—and, all too often, soft-boiled.

I suppose it all comes back to the hunch idea, although, of course, success isn't possible without style and form and technique. I believe the artist calls this "technical expression." Anyhow, it's all in the hands, just as so many problems on the sport field and in life narrow themselves down to good hands and bad. I once asked Meighan, for example, what his basic test of the actor was, and his answer was brief but conclusive.

"Hands," he said instantly. "A man either acts, or he doesn't, with his hands."

Recalling so many things that have been said of Garbo's charm, I could do no less than agree. The lady has the most expressive hands I've ever seen. Pavlova was a great danseuse, but her real grace was in her arms and hands, even her finger tips. I wondered once just how far this went with tennis and even polled the opinion of Fred Perry, the world's champion, and Wilmer Allison, one of the great Americans.

"It's here," both said, thrusting out their hands, "from the elbow down to the fingers. It's in the grip and the hand and the wrist. Anything else you do on a tennis court can only supplement what you have there."

From my standpoint, golfers can forget the pivot, the left heel, the right toe and all the other blather they hear about the swing, and remember only that the hands do the hitting. When they do that, they will play golf. After all, you can stiffen your left elbow, but you can't hit a golf ball with it.