

# ON 75TH ANNIVERSARY: RECOGNIZE HOGAN'S FIFTH U.S. OPEN

By Ron Sirak • @ronsirak  
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The New Year is all about resolving to be better, to right wrongs. Golf has a chance to fix a major mistake in 2017 on the diamond anniversary of a lost accomplishment by one of the game's greatest players. The USGA should acknowledge that Ben Hogan won the U.S. Open five times, not four.

Once when asked why he beats the drum so loudly and consistently for Hogan, the World Golf Hall of Fame writer Dan Jenkins replied: "Because if I don't, they will forget him." Indeed, one of the obligations of those who've been around is to remind those who haven't of the past. Tiger Woods did not invent golf. Before him was Jack Nicklaus and before Nicklaus was Hogan.

Jenkins, who covered his first major in 1950, is virtually unique in his perspective on the game's three greatest players: He covered them all. Dan was born in 1929 and the first U.S. Open he attended was as an 11-year-old fan in 1941 at Colonial Country Club in his hometown of Fort Worth, Texas. So he remembers the 1942 U.S. Open that wasn't but actually was. And he's long been an advocate of setting straight golf's greatest accounting error.

When they tee it up in June for the 117th U.S. Open at Erin Hills, the USGA can fix things by breaking Hogan's tie with Nicklaus, Bobby Jones and Willie Anderson for career U.S. Open victories.

This year is the 75th anniversary of the Hale America National Open, a fundraiser for the Navy Relief Society and the USO held only in 1942. The USGA, PGA and Chicago Golf Association ran it at Ridgemoor CC in Chicago. More than 1,500 players tried to qualify at 69 sites around the country. The winner got the same gold medal a U.S. Open winner gets and \$1,200 in war bonds.

And the winner was Hogan, by three strokes over the great Jimmy Demaret. If it walks like a U.S. Open and talks like a U.S. Open, isn't it a U.S. Open, no matter what name it carries?

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the USGA decided it would be unseemly to conduct the U.S. Open in 1942. But there was a demand for a high-quality tournament as a diversion from the war and the idea of a fundraiser was hatched.

Pretty much everyone except Sam Snead, who was already in the service, was in the field, including the 1941 winner at Colonial, Craig Wood, 1940 winner Lawson Little, 1939 champion Byron Nelson and the guy who would win in 1946 when the tournament resumed, Lloyd Mangrum. Others included Mike Turnesa, Paul Runyon, Jimmy Thompson, Ky Laffoon, Horton Smith, Jug McSpaden and Demaret.

There was no U.S. Open in 1943-45 then Hogan won the title in 1948, '50, '51 and '53. He missed the 1949 Open because of the car crash that nearly took his life. In 1952, he finished third. In 1955, he lost a playoff to Jack Fleck and in 1960, his last hurrah at the U.S. Open at age 47, he was in the hunt until the 71st hole at Cherry Hills as the past, present and future collided: Hogan, winner Arnold Palmer and Nicklaus, the amateur runner-up.

Hogan was Mr. U.S. Open. From 1940 through 1960 he never finished out

of the top 10. But acknowledging his victory at the Hale America would rewrite the record book. Not only would he surpass Anderson, Jones and Nicklaus for victories, his winning score would be a record at 17 under par. But that's less startling in a tournament where par is traditionally a great score than it once was. Rory McIlroy shot 16-under-par to win in 2011 and Woods was 12- under in 2000.

The simple fact that there were qualifiers for the Hale America, like in a U.S. Open, that the tournament was run, in part, by the USGA and that the winner received the U.S. Open gold medal makes it a major championship. And that would mean Hogan has 10 majors, not nine.

The leader in men's professional majors is Nicklaus (18) followed by Woods (14) and Walter Hagen (11). Gary Player (9) would follow Hogan. The Hogan number is remarkable considering he never played four majors in a season. Nicklaus played four majors every year from 1962 through 1997, a streak of 146 that ended at the 1998 British Open.

Hogan played in only 58 majors total, first because of travel and purse issues at the British Open and then because of leg issues after his car crash. From the 1946 PGA Championship through the 1953 British Open, Hogan won nine of the 16 majors he played and from 1946 through 1953 he finished in the top seven in 17 of 18 majors. For his career, Hogan was top-10 in 40 of 58 majors.

Yes, there was greatness before Woods, and before Nicklaus. Bantam Ben was, like Nicklaus, Woods, Hagen, Player and Jones, at his best in the majors. It's been 75 years. Let's acknowledge reality: Hogan won five U.S. Open titles. After all, we don't want people to forget. It would make for a fun party at Erin Hills.