

What Is Tom Watson Driving At?

With Ben Hogan's top half, Jack Nicklaus's bottom half, and a garbage-canful of guts, Watson has become the world's greatest golfer. Now, at thirty-two, he has bigger things on his mind

by
DAVID
OWEN

IT IS POSSIBLE TO WONDER WHY sensible people play golf. The golf swing is one of the most complex and unnatural movements in all of sports. Its plane of motion slices through the body at an awkward angle, neither parallel nor perpendicular to the golfer's stance. Turning the hip a fraction of a second too soon or a few degrees in the wrong direction can send the ball careering out of bounds. A slight misplacement of the thumb can destroy any shot. When a golfer finds he is having trouble with his game, he begins to worry about things like the thickness of his socks.

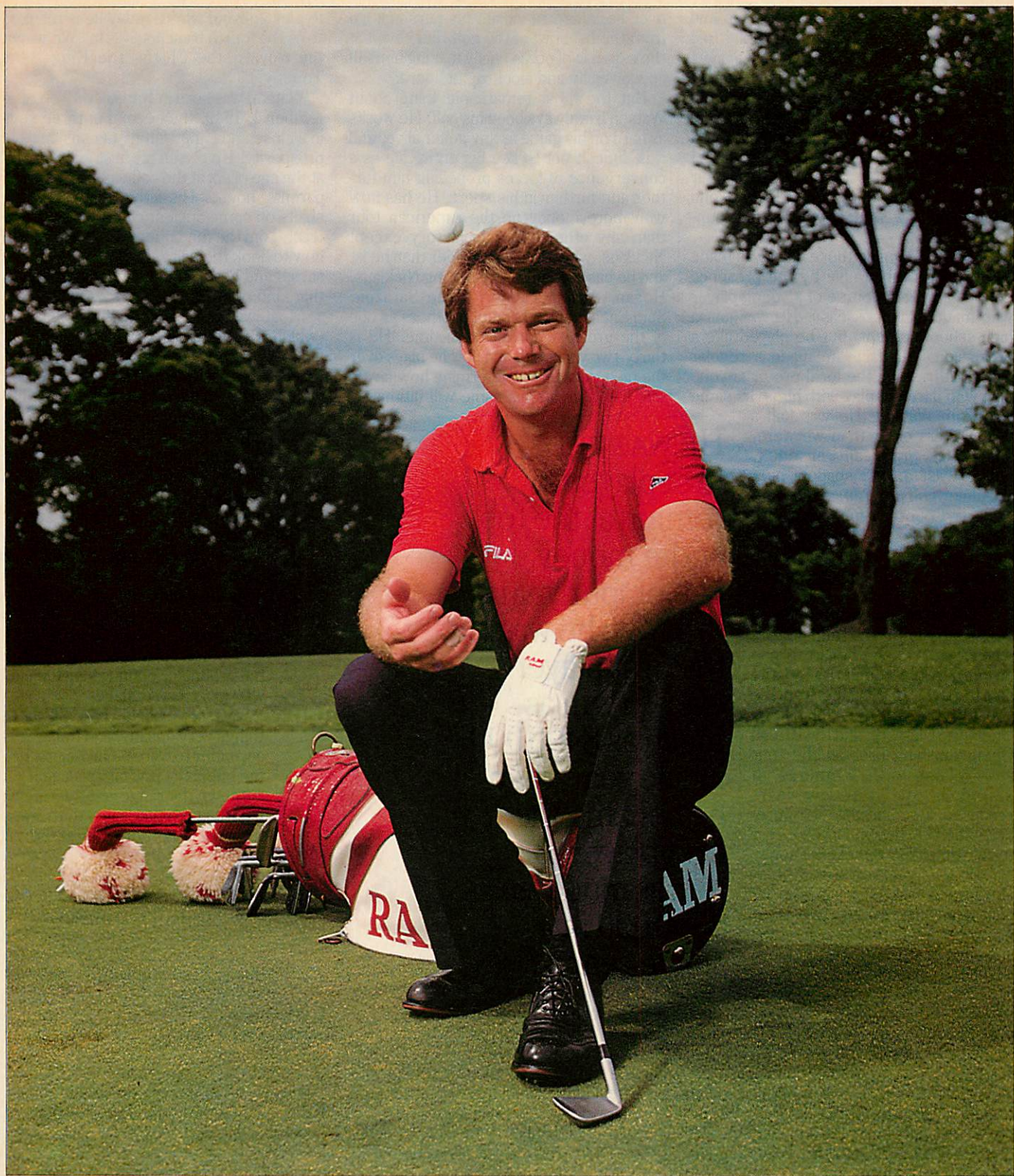
One measure of a sport's inherent difficulty is the amount of lying it provokes in the people who play it casually. A man continually baffled and humiliated by a game he plays for relaxation will soon begin to lie about it, and weekend golfers are the most notorious liars of all. One of the great clubhouse jokes

involves a golfer so used to cheating that when he makes a hole in one, he marks it on his scorecard as a zero.

If it's hard to imagine playing golf in the first place, it's nearly impossible to conceive of playing it for a living. The odds against a talented young golfer's making a name for himself as a pro are almost incalculable. Even if he manages to earn his tour card from the Professional Golfers' Association (about one chance in twenty on his first try) and then qualify for a tournament (roughly one chance in ten any given week), he still faces the challenge of playing well enough over the first two days to be allowed to remain in the competition. Players who don't make the cut don't earn a cent. Merely meeting expenses on the tour requires winning a minimum of twenty-five thousand dollars, something 139 card-carrying pros failed to do in 1981; that figure doesn't include the considerable number of players who earned no money at all. A top player's caddy, who takes home a percentage of his boss's winnings, can clear more money in a good year than most professional golfers.

My own brief and lamentable experience with golf took place

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Tom Watson

roughly fifteen years ago, toward the end of elementary school. My father had told me that a young man ought to have a sport he could play for the rest of his life, and I was duly signed up for lessons. I found the game somewhat more interesting than tennis, but my enjoyment was hampered by my apparently seamless ineptitude. I couldn't swing a club for more than an hour without creating enormous blisters, and the ball never went near where it was supposed to go.

Playing bad golf in those days was made all the more unbearable by the presence on the same golf course of a young player who made it all look easy. He was just a high school student, but he played like a professional. In fact, he made a regular habit of thrashing the local pro or anyone else who dared to play with him. His name was Tom Watson. He was half a dozen years older than we were, and hence practically an adult, but he cast a long shadow over the junior golf program at the Kansas City Country Club, where we played. While some of my friends redoubled their efforts and strove to emulate him, I happily put away my clubs.

I didn't pay much attention to golf again until the mid-1970s, when Tom Watson began to pop up with some regularity on the sports page. In 1977 he won the Crosby Pro-Am, the San Diego Open, the Masters, and the British Open, finishing first on the tour money list with winnings of \$310,653. The next few years produced a remarkable string of firsts: he was the first player ever to remain at the top of the money list for four years in a row (Ben Hogan and Jack Nicklaus are the only other players who have ever managed even three years at a stretch); he was the first (and remains the only) player ever to win as much as \$400,000 in a single year (\$462,636 in 1979); he was the first player ever to win as much as \$500,000 in a single year (\$530,808 in 1980); he was the first player ever to be the top money winner, the Vardon Trophy winner (for the lowest scoring average), and PGA Player of the Year for three years running (no one else has ever managed that triple feat for even two years in a row).

Watson distinguished himself in other ways as well. He defied sports tradition by regularly turning down more endorsement offers than he accepted, and even today he limits his promotional efforts to half a dozen products and services he actually uses. He gave a great deal of time to charitable causes, organizing an annual exhibition match that each year turns over more than a quarter of a million dollars to Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City. He bent

over backward to isolate his personal life from the fishbowl of the golf tour, even at the expense of occasionally making himself appear chilly and aloof to outsiders.

But the most remarkable thing about Watson has always been his golf. He works as hard on his game as any golfer alive, and it is difficult not to see his entire life as a convergence of forces propelling him further and further in his sport. He has now won more money on the American tour than any other golfer in history except Nicklaus, who is ten years older than he is, and he has earned a place among Nicklaus, Hogan, Arnold Palmer, Gene Sarazen, Sam Snead, and a handful of others as one of the greatest golfers of all time. He is thirty-two years old, and how he plays over the next decade will determine how far up that list of greats his name will ultimately

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be inscribed. His magnificent victory at the U.S. Open in June took him one step closer to the top. Many people who follow the game closely say that if he fulfills his potential, he could one day be remembered as the greatest golfer ever.

Before that happens, I decided, I ought to learn something about his game.

DRIVING IN FROM THE AIRPORT, YOU skirt the fringes of a shopping center called the Country Club Plaza, take a right a couple of miles up the road just past the Country Club Christian Church, drive down Sixty-third Street through the Country Club District, and enter a prosperous suburb where it isn't always easy to distinguish the front yards of the houses from the back nines of the golf courses. This is Kansas City, where Tom Watson learned

to play golf and where today he is referred to as the fourth franchise (as in "We've got the Royals, the Chiefs, the Kings, and Tommy").

Watson was born in Kansas City on September 4, 1949, the second of three sons in a close and happy family of considerable prosperity. He played his first game of golf at the age of six at the country club near his parents' house. His father shortened the shafts on some ancient clubs and began to teach Tom the fundamentals. "I taught him how to hook the ball and how to fade it," he says, "and how to hit it low and hit it high, that kind of stuff."

Most weekend golfers think of hooks (which are shots that curve to the left) and fades (which curve to the right—also called slices) as horrible errors, but good players know that a perfectly straight shot is essentially an accident. The tilting swing plane of the golf stroke naturally imparts some spin to the ball, making it curve as it flies through the air. By learning to adjust his stance and swing, and by controlling the angle of the club head at impact, a skilled golfer can make the ball go essentially wherever he wants it to. By adding backspin or top spin with another adjustment, he can also make the ball either stop dead when it hits the ground or bound along the fairway for extra yardage.

Watson learned to do all these things very quickly, and today he is a wonder to watch. On the practice tee one day I saw him pick a target far down the range and then attack it with shots that seemed to come from all directions. First he hit some balls so that they curved in from the right, then he hit some so that they curved in from the left, then he smacked a few straight on. "That's the fun of the game," he says. "Being able to spin the ball in the direction you want." The shots landed so close to one another that a

lazy outfielder could have caught them all without taking more than a few steps in any direction. When Watson was a little older, he was put to work as a weekend caddy for his father's golfing friends. The arrangement never worked very smoothly: young Tommy had a habit of leaving the grown-ups stranded while he raced ahead to play his own ball. Despite his failings as a caddy, though, Watson made some important discoveries about golf. The first was that he had a natural talent for it; the second was that he loved to play.

The older players in the golfing group helped Watson refine his swing. Bob Willits, who is married to Tommy's godmother, was the 1947 Missouri Amateur champion. Willits and Watson's father had been playing together since they were ten

years old, and both were excellent. All the golfers worked hard on their games, and the competition could sometimes become quite heated. Watson's father, who was known for having a temper on the golf course, would sometimes throw a club into the trees after making a bad shot. The other men didn't like these outbursts, and one day, when Mr. Watson had hurled another club, they all took their own clubs and threw them at *him*. Then they chased him off the course. Young Tommy may never have thought of this as a lesson to himself, but he has always worked hard to maintain control of his emotions on a golf course. He can make a bad shot, grin gamely, and put it out of his mind.

The main thing Watson took away from his outings with the grown-ups was a love for competition. "It was a pressure situation," he says today. "I wanted to play well. And it made me try harder to get the best out of my game." He thrived on playing with older golfers, on showing them what he could do. In 1964, playing in a Memorial Day foursome with his father, his golf coach, and Stan Thirsk, the club professional, Watson shot a stunning 67, beating all three older men and earning himself a mention in *Sports Illustrated*. He was fourteen years old. The same year, he entered the Kansas City Golf Association's Match Play Championship, a tournament for adults, and astonished everyone by winning it. Playing with kids his own age began to lose its luster: on July 6 he tied for best score in a qualifying round for the National Junior Amateur Tournament, but he decided to forfeit his berth in the contest in order to take a vacation with his family.

In high school, at Kansas City's Pembroke-Country Day, Watson worked hard on his golf. In the summer he spent long hours on the practice range, refining his game one element at a time. Stan Thirsk would describe to him what a good swing ought to feel like, and then Tom would work until he got it: he would practice until he could feel the club head through his entire swing; he would swing behind the ball and through the ball; he would hit it with his hands. He worked on his grip and his stance. He practiced his take-away a few degrees at a time, checking to make sure the club head was on the proper path. He learned how far he could hit each of his clubs and taught himself to judge distances. Today he can look down a fairway and tell you almost exactly how many yards away he is standing from any landmark you happen to point out. He set tasks for himself and worked on them over and over until he felt he had mastered them. A high school friend remembers seeing him on

the golf course one day chipping balls at a golf cart parked fifteen yards away, aiming his shots with practiced accuracy at the serial number painted on its side.

Watson has a great deal of power—he once hit a tee shot 370 yards in a U.S. Amateur tournament—but he is also a player of extraordinary finesse. He is arguably the finest putter in the game and can make a thirty-footer on a slippery green look like a gimme. He has taught himself to "read" greens with the soles of his feet, walking along the line to the hole and sensing the undulations through his shoes. When he was young, he learned to play on hard greens, soft greens, rolling greens, smooth greens—adjusting his stroke to the immediate conditions. He learned the putting peculiarities of different kinds of grass. Some greens, for in-

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stance, are sown with Bermuda grass, a creeping variety that has a definite grain, like the nap of a carpet. A ball hit against the grain will travel more slowly than a ball hit with it; a ball hit crosswise will curve in the direction of the grain. Watson learned how to read the direction and change his stroke accordingly.

Watson is also generally acknowledged as one of the very best players ever "from the four-iron down"—the clubs used over intermediate and short distances. Last year he led the PGA in saving pars from sand traps by consistently placing his bunker shots closer to the hole than many players are able to putt. He is so good with a sand wedge, in fact, that he thinks the club makes the game too easy.

Despite his patient devotion to the game as a teenager, Watson was far from obses-

sive about his golf. No one was forcing him to play; when he went to the golf course, it was because he wanted to. There were times when he did not. He put his clubs away each August, when football practice began, and he didn't take them out again until the end of February, when basketball season was over. Golfers strike most people as the least athletic of athletes, but Watson made a name for himself in every sport he tried. He was cocaptain of the varsity basketball team and, according to a coach, one of the most outstanding shooting guards the school had ever had. In his senior year he was quarterback (and leading rusher) on the football team, which he led to a conference championship.

Watson's athletic abilities have always been complemented by a sturdy character. In high school he won a trophy for sportsmanship, having impressed his coaches with his attitude (although he was once suspended from school for smoking at a dance). "Tommy was never a hotshot," says Pat White, who coached him in eleventh and twelfth grade. "He was always a nice guy, and extremely honest. I remember when he was playing in the Missouri Amateur, he backed away from a putt and assessed a penalty stroke on himself because he had touched the ball. Nobody had seen it, but *he* knew that he had done it. And that's just the way he played everything."

Watson also played to win. "He burns inside," says Bob Willits. From his earliest games with his father's friends right down through his last state championship, Watson wanted to be a winner. His coaches marveled at his determination, nicknaming him Huckleberry Dillinger: Huckleberry because his reddish hair and good-natured, gap-toothed grin made him look like a character out of Twain; Dillinger because on a golf course or a playing field he had the unflappable nerve of a gangster. Nowadays he has a different nickname: the caddies on the tour call him Hawk because of the unrelenting aggressiveness with which he attacks a golf course.

"There is no material for the analyst's couch in Jack," the British golf writer P. J. Ward-Thomas once wrote of Jack Nicklaus. The same is true of Watson. There is no tyrannical father in his past, no overbearing mother. He was born with a certain talent and then discovered that developing it was fun. His father and his father's friends helped him refine his game, but Watson was always the master of his own ambitions. "I love the game," he says. "And that's what it is: it's a game, it's a sport, it's fun." He works hard because the better he becomes, the more fun he

has. Playing with grown-ups whetted his appetite for competition. Basketball improved his eye-hand coordination, and football strengthened his arms and legs. His family provided the security he needed to pursue his talent.

"It always had a kind of logical order to it," Watson says. "There was the time and work I'd put into it, the love that I had for it, the ambition to succeed. That was always there, always there."

It was thus something of a surprise when, toward the end of his senior year in high school, Watson told Pat White that he wasn't going to turn pro. The thought of living out of a suitcase for much of the rest of his life did not appeal to him. Frequently an honor student in high school, he was determined to make something of himself in college and, later, in the business world. All his friends were in Kansas City, and he wanted to return there to raise a family. So in the fall of 1967 he headed west to Stanford, without an athletic scholarship, to prepare himself for a probable career in the insurance business.

AS TIME WENT BY, THOUGH, WATSON began to have a change of heart. "My four years at Stanford didn't prepare me for anything very practical," he says, "and I ended up making the decision that my only real talent was golf." He had been playing on the Stanford golf team and doing fairly well, although he hadn't met with any remarkable success. Watson's main recurring weakness as a golfer—and it's been with him ever since he was a child—is a tendency to lose control of his driver. In college his tee shots were often "high and wild," a friend says, and on the windswept courses in California he often got himself in trouble. Even so, he thought he was good enough to try the tour. In December of his senior year, he told his father that he wanted to turn professional. Mr. Watson's old golf group got together and agreed to back him for his first four years, paying his expenses in return for a share of his winnings, if any.

Watson got off to a creditable start, earning \$31,081 his first full year and returning a few dollars to his investors. He traveled between tournaments by car and enjoyed his relative freedom. He also worked on his game. "I practiced for hours and hours and hours and hours," he says, "and I played in lots of tournaments, and I started teaching myself how to play."

Watson also soon discovered the differences between professional and amateur golf. Golf is as much a mental game as a physical one; it can exert an enormous psychological pressure on the people who play it seriously. Much of the pressure arises from the fact that a golfer can blow an entire tournament with one unlucky hole, or even one miscalculated putt. It's not uncommon for the winning margin in a tournament to be a single stroke, which

means that over the course of four days, one lapse in concentration, one unexpected gust of wind, one error in club selection can make the difference between winning and losing. "Every shot is a seventy-two-hole tournament," Watson says.

Watson felt the pressure of the tour and set about learning to master it. His second season was an improvement over his first, and in the middle of it he married Linda Rubin, whom he had dated since high school. Linda had been reluctant to be a golfer's wife; after turning down two proposals, she finally gave in. "If I'd known how great the tour was going to be," she said later, "I'd have married him in college." Linda became a crucial ingredient in Tom's success, handling all of his travel arrangements and accompanying him (as she still does) to virtually every tournament he played in. Having Linda beside him enabled Watson to devote even more of his energy to his game. The next year, 1974, he improved again: he won his first pro tournament, the Western Open, and finished tenth on the tour money list. "Tommy sure beats the hell out of the stock market," crowed Bob Willits.

Despite his success on the golf course, and despite the geniality of his nature, Watson was slow to win a permanent place in the hearts of certain sports fans, particularly in the hearts of certain writers. The principal reason for this has to do with the game itself. Golf is unique among sports in that good players can continue to be factors in tournaments until they are well into their fifties. The game gives up its longtime heroes only with the greatest reluctance. Jack Nicklaus was actually booed by spectators when he first began to challenge Arnold Palmer.

Watson's initiation was just as harrowing, although most of it took place at the hands of the press. In his first years on the tour, he threw away several tournaments by turning in terrible scores in the final rounds. He was immediately labeled a choker. In 1974 he led the U.S. Open by a stroke going into the final round but ended up in a three-way tie for fourth. At the Tournament Players Championship in 1977, he led by one stroke going into the final nine holes, and lost. The following week he blew a four-stroke lead at the Heritage Classic. For weeks he couldn't step into a press room without being barged with nasty questions about his courage. He had won a number of tournaments and he had played some brilliant golf, but the reporters were reluctant to see Nicklaus challenged; they leaped with a vengeance on the most debilitating weakness they could think of.

Watson is the first to admit that he had difficulty dealing with final-round pressure early in his career, but *choking* is an entirely inappropriate word for what he went through. Watson has always been a gambler on a golf course, attempting risky



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and even outlandish shots when he thought they were needed to win. In one tournament he tried to bank a shot off a tree when he could find no other line to the green. In another, when his approach shot had sailed over the green and landed a few inches in front of a boundary wall, he hit his ball *into* the wall and bounced it back toward the green—a shot made all the more difficult by the fact that the wall was liberally perforated with gaping, brick-sized holes. It took him a few years, and a few victories, to learn how to harness the competing surges of anxiety and adrenaline he felt on the final holes of a tournament. But he has never been a timid golfer. As fellow pro Hubert Green once said, "He's got a garbage-canful of guts."

In 1977 Watson's game came together. At the Masters he roared down the stretch under enormous pressure to overtake Jack Nicklaus, who had fought his way into the lead. The final turning point came on the seventeenth hole when Watson, after making a beautiful approach shot that landed about sixteen feet from the pin, sank his putt for a birdie and moved a stroke ahead. The crowd cheered. Nicklaus, who was playing one hole ahead, heard the uproar and realized that the pressure was now on him. He muffed his shot and missed a putt. Watson kept his cool and ended up the winner by two strokes.

People who marveled at Watson's performance in the Masters were still unprepared for what they saw a few months later at the British Open in Turnberry, Scotland, a tournament whose final two rounds have been hailed as the single greatest head-to-head confrontation in the five-hundred-year history of the game.

Midway through the Turnberry epic, the 1977 British Open reduced itself to a confrontation between Watson and Nicklaus. The two men shot identical rounds for the first two days and were paired for the third. Nicklaus pulled ahead by two strokes after nine holes, but Watson fought his way back. When the day ended, they were tied once again.

On the fourth and final round, Nicklaus jumped to a three-stroke lead after only four holes, but Watson birdied three of the next four holes to bring himself back to a tie. They battled back and forth until, by the time they reached the thirteenth hole, Nicklaus had carved out a solid two-stroke lead. Few people believed that Watson had a chance. But Watson picked up a stroke on thirteen by hitting a nice wedge shot and putt for a birdie. He then pulled even on fifteen by sinking a mind-boggling sixty-foot putt that began ten feet *off* the green on a hard, smooth embankment and broke about four feet to the right to find the hole.

"I stroked the putt," Watson said later, "and the ball looked like it was going a little bit too firm. Then it caught the right-center of the hole, hit the pin, and went in for a two; Nicklaus two-putted and we were

...What was my anticipation before I hit the putt? At that point I had a pretty good line on it. It didn't do a lot of things. I knew it went down, but it was a pretty straight putt at the beginning and then it broke right. If the ball had been hit a little too hard—as it was—and it had not hit the pin, it would have gone four to five feet past the hole. I was worried before I hit it."

On the seventeenth hole, a five-hundred-yard par 5, Nicklaus put his tee shot in the rough while Watson drove down the center of the fairway. Watson studied his line to the flag and selected his 3-iron for his second shot. He gave the ball his best swing of the day and sent it soaring straight toward the pin.

Nicklaus swallowed hard when he saw what Watson had done and chose a 4-iron for his own shot. He hit it badly and watched his ball land in the rough in front and to the right of the green. He then made a beautiful chip shot to within four feet of the hole. If he made his putt, he would have a birdie. He missed it. Watson two-putted and moved into the lead.

When Watson and Nicklaus stepped up to the eighteenth tee, Nicklaus knew he had to make a spectacular finish if he hoped to force a tie. Watson cautiously abandoned his driver and played a 1-iron shot down the middle of the fairway. Nicklaus then pushed his drive into nearly impenetrable rough beside the fairway, apparently putting himself out of the contest. Watson selected a 7-iron and hit a stunning shot that landed two feet from the pin. Nicklaus summoned everything he had left and made a recovery shot from under a bush, which put his ball on the distant green thirty-five feet from the hole.

The gallery erupted, then fell silent. Watson turned to his caddy and said, "You know, Jack is going to make that putt." And Nicklaus did. Watson now had to sink his own putt to win. It was a short putt, but a miss would force a play-off. Watson stepped up to his ball and, without a moment's hesitation, knocked it into the center of the hole.

Watson's four-day score in the tournament beat the old British Open record by eight strokes and left his nearest challenger, excluding Nicklaus, eleven strokes behind. Watson had entered the Open a very promising young golfer, but he emerged from it something entirely different. "I just couldn't shake him," Nicklaus said. Six years before, when Watson had been preparing to play in his first tournament as a pro, a high school friend had asked him what he hoped to accomplish on the tour. "I hope," Watson said, "to be the best golfer in the world." Now, after beating Nicklaus in two extraordinary contests in a single year, he had become precisely that.

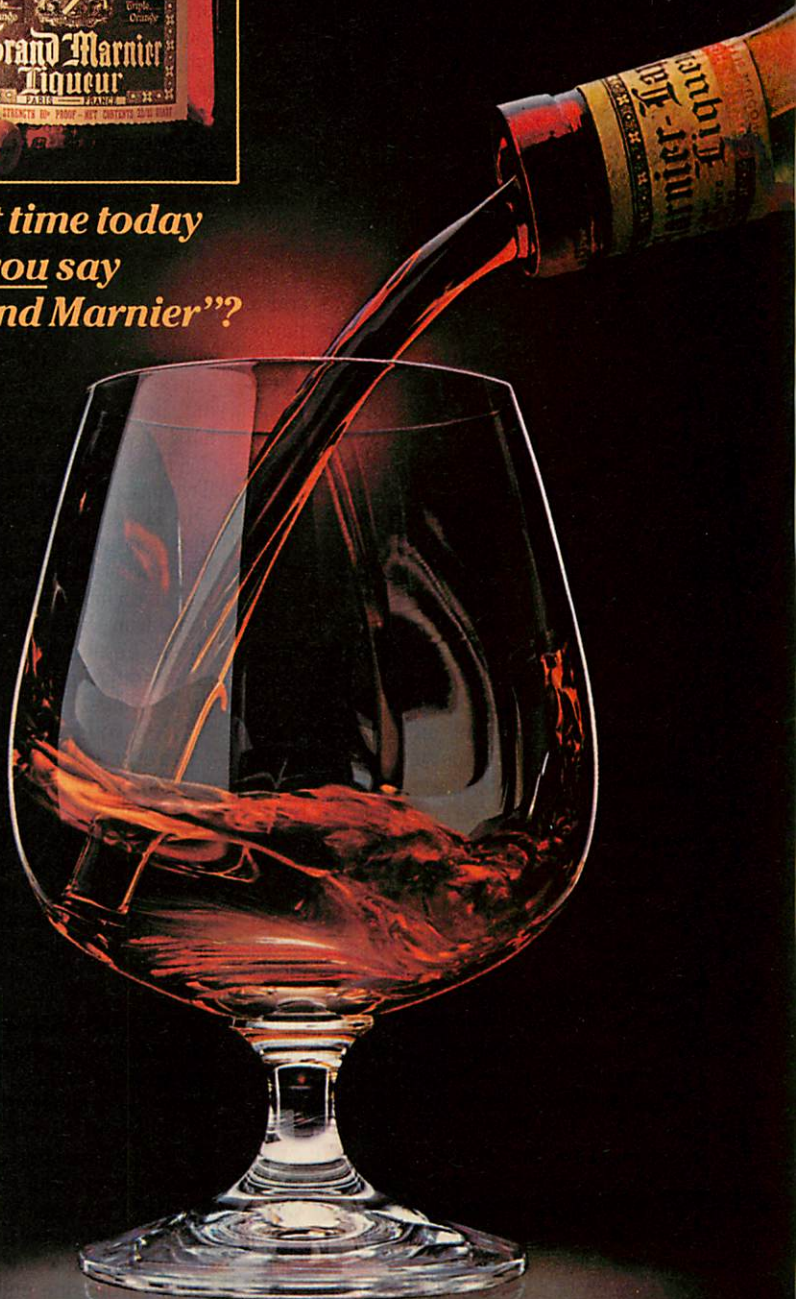
"I'VE ALWAYS ENJOYED PLAYING IN front of people," Watson says. "I've always had the desire to show them I can play a

10:04 P.M.

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good golf shot and to have that type of appreciation coming back to me. You might say I'm kind of a ham in that sense. I'm not the type of person who goes out and tries to entertain the gallery with my mouth. There are only a couple of guys on the tour who can do that. I try to entertain people with my golf."

It's an ordinary day in southern Florida. The sun is shining. Lizards are scampering in the branches of the trees. Ducks with gruesome, buzzardlike heads are wandering through the grass. All nine planets are positioned on the same side of the sun, a fact that has local newscasters cheerfully predicting the end of the world.

"My right arm is gradually rising because of the gravitational pull of the Jupiter Effect," Watson says, his right arm gradually rising.

We are sitting in the clubhouse at the Inverrary Country Club in Lauderhill, home of the Inverrary Classic. Watson is talking about his sport and signing autographs for a more or less constant stream of middle-aged women.

It isn't hard to understand the attraction. Watson is a striking figure with more than his share of the comfortable good looks that are doled out to professional golfers with their birth certificates. He has a boyish grin and penetrating eyes and a weather-beaten tan. He also has a remarkable body. His legs are bulging with muscles. His forearms are as big as Popeye's and as solid as four-by-fours. Another golf professional once said that Watson had Ben Hogan's top half and Jack Nicklaus's bottom half, which is the golfing equivalent of a football player with Joe Namath's right arm and O. J. Simpson's legs.

Watson rounds out the package with a personality that falls somewhere between youthful good humor and deadly seriousness. He has often been faulted for not being more of a wild and crazy guy on the golf course. But he deals with the pressure of the tour by maintaining an even emotional keel. Lee Trevino deals with the pressure by telling jokes. Both men have the same goal: they want to play good golf. Watson's close friends say his personality has barely changed since he was a teenager, quite an achievement for a man who has gone from being well known in Kansas City to being famous all over the world.

Watson is in a relaxed and jovial mood this morning; he has just returned from a two-week vacation in Kansas City with his wife, Linda, and his two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Meg. The break was made all the sweeter by the fact that just before it he had won the Los Angeles Open, his first victory of the new season.

Sportswriters treated Watson's February Los Angeles victory as though it were the resurrection of Lazarus; he had been winless since the Atlanta Classic in June. Not much of a slump, as these things are measured—most professional golfers pass

their entire lives without a win, and Atlanta was Watson's third tour victory in 1981 alone and the twenty-fifth of his career—but as the game's dominant player he is expected to be brilliant all the time. At the end of the season last year, though, he was simply too tired to play consistently well. During the few weeks when he wasn't on tour, he was looking after his business interests or playing in charity matches or trying to steal a few moments with his family. The heavy schedule took a toll on his health, and his golf suffered as a result.

"My position now puts me under pressure to do things beyond playing golf," he says. "It's very difficult. There are times when I would like to be able to go directly from the eighteenth green to the practice tee without having to go to the press room. I used to be able to do it. Now there's a pressure that wasn't there before. I'm certainly glad it's there, but there are times when I wish I had the freedom to do what I want to do, which is play golf."

On the practice range later on, Watson is working on his swing. Like most professional golfers, he tinkers incessantly with his game, searching for that least attainable of prizes, the perfectly repeatable stroke. "Every shot is a misshot," he says, "unless it goes into the hole." He is now mis-hitting a bucket of balls with such dizzying skill that a duffer in the spectators' gallery says, "It makes you want to shoot yourself." When Watson finishes his workout, he strolls over to Lee Trevino, who is hard at work on his own game.

"The Lord doesn't give you everything," Trevino philosophizes between swings. "He keeps something away from you so that you've got to work. Take Nicklaus. Think what Jack could have won if the Lord had given him a sand wedge." Trevino hits some iron shots while he and Watson talk about boxing and basketball and the greens at Augusta. They also talk about their swings.

"How you hitting?" Trevino asks.

"Pretty good," Watson says.

"You getting too close?"

"I might be."

Trevino makes a few suggestions, and Watson pays close attention. Then he offers some pointers of his own.

"Ah, well," Trevino says. "If we hit it perfect every day, everybody else would quit."

WATSON DIDN'T WIN AT INVERRARY, but he did play some exciting golf when the spirit was upon him. In the second round, on the par-3 sixteenth, he put his first shot on the green, sixty-five feet from the pin. He didn't have a straight line to the cup, though, because a big peninsula of rough jutted out between it and his ball. He studied the situation for a while, then put away his putter, took out a sand wedge, and *chipped* from one end of the green to the other. His stroke was so pure that the club

head didn't even touch the grass. The ball soared over the rough and rolled into the hole for a birdie.

The challenge Watson faces now is clear. He needs to keep winning major tournaments. (He has now won six—three British Opens, two Masters, and one U.S. Open.) He also needs to conquer the gremlin in his driver and arrive at a happy compromise in his quest for the perfect swing. He is the only golfer of the last decade to give Nicklaus a serious run for the money, but he is far from satisfied with what he has achieved to date. Being the best player in the world at the moment is a heady achievement, but Watson wants more. He now wants to be remembered as one of the greatest ever, if not *the* greatest ever; and watching him play, you get the feeling he can have just about anything he wants.

At Pebble Beach in June, Watson got something he'd wanted desperately for years: his first victory in a U.S. Open. Near the top of the leader board for the first two days, he finished the next day in a tie for first place. On the fourth day he took the lead early, then fell back into second. Nicklaus, meanwhile, devastated the front nine with five consecutive birdies and pulled himself out of the pack for yet another classic duel with his young rival.

By the time Nicklaus finished his round, the two were tied for the lead at four under par. Watson, on the par-3 seventeenth, was in serious trouble: he had put his tee shot into the deep grass beside the green. His ball was only sixteen feet from the hole, but the green was hard and fast and it sloped downhill. Once Watson put the ball in motion, there would be nothing to stop it. Everyone watching—including Nicklaus, who was glued to a TV set in the finish tent—figured he'd be lucky to get out with a par.

But Watson wasn't thinking in terms of par. He studied his lie; it was a shot he'd practiced before, for hours and hours, and he thought he could make it. His caddy urged him to play it safe, but Watson had already decided to go for the hole.

"I said to myself there was no way in the world he was going to get a birdie from there," Nicklaus said later. "Then he holed the shot and made golf history." Watson's shot was one of the greatest in the history of the game; it was also one of the bravest. He gambled the entire tournament on it. And won.

Watson now has more major wins than Lee Trevino or Byron Nelson, and he is just one short of Arnold Palmer and Sam Snead. "It makes me feel my career is one plateau higher," he says. Nicklaus is still a formidable rival, but Watson has faced him in four classic confrontations and beaten him every time. His victory at the U.S. Open was one of golf's greatest. But when you look into Watson's eyes, it's impossible not to believe, as he does himself, that you ain't seen nothin' yet. ☺