

George Hannon

TEXAS LEGENDS

Gorge Hannon is probably best known as coach of the

University of Texas golf team during the period when the Longhorns, led by Tom Kite and Ben Crenshaw, won back-to-back NCAA titles in 1971-1972.

What few people realize is that Hannon was responsible for the securing the Longhorn golf team's mascot, "Swingin' Bevo." The icon originated with *Dallas Morning News* cartoonist Bill McClanahan, who drew cartoon mascots during football season.

Hannon asked coach Darrell Royal, a friend of McClanahan, to ask the artist to draw the UT character swinging a golf club. McClanahan agreed and Hannon paid \$10 for two versions.

The rest is branding history.

Coaching collegiate golf is certainly a worthwhile calling in and of itself, but there is more to George Hannon than coaching. He is a PGA professional, a member of the Texas Golf Hall of Fame and a down-home throwback to a time when people were valued as individuals and collegiate athletics were meant to be fun and life-enhancing for students. Hannon saw incredible changes during his tenure at UT.

Once an athletic afterthought, college golf became a proving ground for great players who would almost inevitably turn professional in search of boatloads of cash.

Kemp native Hannon had some rural roots—a grandfather who farmed and died early of tuberculosis—and some semi-urban roots, including a college educated grandmother who dipped snuff and encouraged her grandson to listen to opera music. Hannon also has one foot in golf's golden age of amateurs and the other in the game's lucrative professional present.

The story of Hannon's golf career begins in tiny Mineola,

GEORGE HANNON

On the 40th anniversary of UT's 1971 NCAA title, we look at the methods of a legendary coach who took pride in teaching people, not golf

By Frances G. Trimble

Copyright 2011



where father Sam Hannon was a pharmacist. A Baylor University graduate, Samuel urged his son to follow in his footsteps, and young George initially intended to do just that.

George played high school golf on Mineola's nine-hole course, graduated and went off to Austin to study pharmacy at Texas in 1942. World War II intervened and Hannon served in the Army Air Corps as a radio operator and gunner on a B-24 bomber in the Pacific Theatre.

In 1946, Hannon went back to school at Austin and worked part-time at Lions Municipal Golf Course, lovingly referred to as "Old Munny." Lions occupied land owned by UT, and its existence is now in jeopardy due to a penchant for covering open space with concrete. Lions was, and is, a major gathering place for local golfers. Along with old Austin Country Club, it also was the home of the Longhorns golf teams.

Hannon, who had married Joza Jean Shropshire in 1947, began to think seriously about becoming a golf professional. He finally worked up the courage to inform the folks back home. The news did not sit well, but working through the situation gave Hannon an understanding of young people, the workings of the youthful mind and how to strive for what he really wanted.

Hannon never played on the UT golf team because the pharmacy program did not allow the necessary practice time. He did, however, play intramural tennis, and he partnered with wife Jo's cousin, Reece Alexander. Alexander played collegiate golf alongside Texas Golf Hall of Fame member Morris Williams Jr. and eventually became a well known pro in his own right.

In spring of 1954 Hannon followed his dream and went to work for head pro Graham Ross at Dallas Athletic Country Club. In an odd twist of fate, it was here he got a taste of coaching.

Ross did double duty as coach of the SMU golf team but was not in good health and asked Hannon to accompany the team to several

TEXAS LEGENDS

George Hannon



competitions.

Seven years later, Hannon returned to Austin, replacing Tom Penick as professional at Old Muni.

Hannon was tapped to step into the position of golf coach when Harvey Penick retired in August 1963. The pay was \$500 a month to shepherd the team part-time and supervise golf operations, first at Lions and later at Morris Williams Golf Course which opened in 1964. The part-time gig was anything but part-time and Hannon typically spent seven days a week on golf team activities, while wife Jo handled office work and city deposits of golf course fees.

Hannon's role was not atypical. When Harvey Penick coached UT, he was head pro at Austin Country Club. Because of club responsibilities, Penick conducted tryouts for golf team spots once a season. Golfers either made the team for the season or they didn't...period.

Penick did his best to make certain the team was prepared for tournaments, leaving individual preparation somewhat up to the individual. The teaching wizard was famous for doing "pass-bys," strolling along the practice range, encouraging players and tweaking their games.

He could look at divots and tell where the ball was going and why. His advice would be simple and to the point. After all, the game was a matter of grip, stance, alignment, ball position and a really unquantifiable, albeit important, element called feel.

In this bygone era, the team was provided money for food, lodging and gasoline, and wished Godspeed. The team traveled in one car, golf clubs included. This situation was not unique to Texas. When Hannon took the golf reins, he not only traveled with the team but also began to recruit players, primarily by telephone.

"I knew a lot of pros around the country and they would call to

tell me about promising youngsters," Hannon said. "My first recruit was an Austin boy named Dan Simpson, whom we nicknamed 'Suitcase.' Unfortunately, Dan didn't make his grades, but he had a good time. He eventually graduated from Southwest Texas (now Texas State) and became an accountant.

"My first blue-chipper was Rik Massengale of Jacksboro, younger brother of touring pro Don Massengale. He was followed by Chip Stewart, son of touring pro Earl Stewart, of Dallas."

Massengale eventually turned professional. Stewart became a businessman. Unfortunately, as talented as Rik and Chip were as incoming freshmen, they did not compete because of existing rules. Freshmen were not allowed to compete until spring of 1968.

Another problem for Hannon was, beginning in 1927, Southwest Conference college golf competitions were conducted by match play. Change came about because football icon Darrell Royal asked Hannon what it would take for the Longhorns to become a top-tier golf program. Coach Royal was into winning, and golf had a special place in his heart because he played the game.

By the 1960s, the independent University of Houston Cougars had the collegiate team to beat. The Coogs had swagger and rabid fans that galleried with the same gusto they brought to basketball games.

Hannon explained the situation to Royal. Teams like Houston, and in a slightly earlier period the University of North Texas, improved individually because team members were exposed to stroke play competition. The Cougars and Mean Green picked tournaments where players were most competitive, while UT was committed to participating in Southwest Conference match play events.

Royal said, "Let's get that changed."

It is Hannon's recollection that all but one of the Southwest Conference coaches agreed with the initial propo **SOL. UT'S J. NEHS**

George Hannon

TEXAS LEGENDS

Thompson and other members of the athletic council tried for seven long years, to no avail.

"In the spring of 1970," Hannon said, "Coach Royal asked, 'What do you think about taking the golf team out of the Southwest Conference?'"

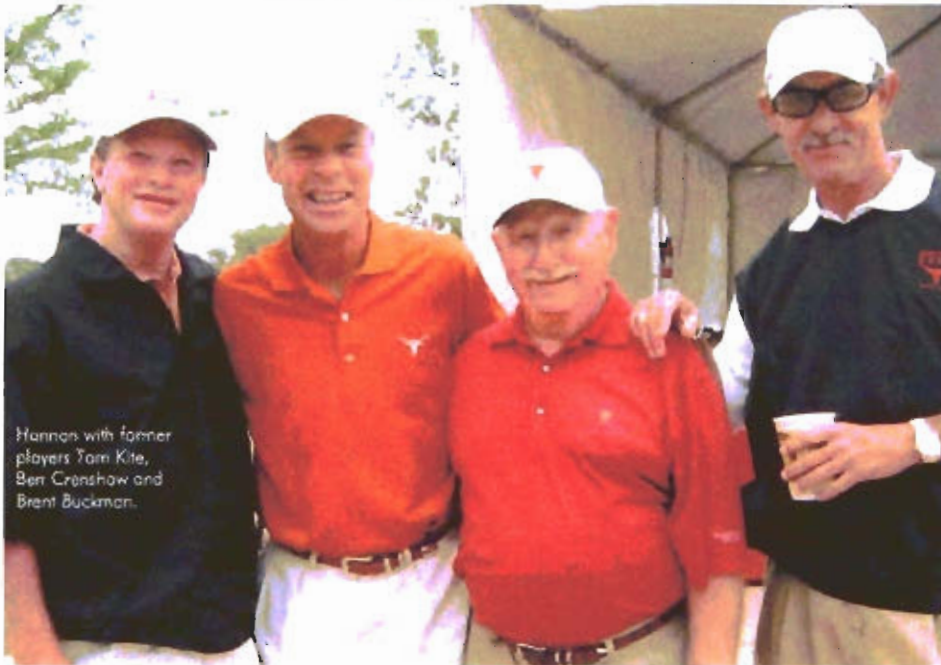
There were other changes in basketball and baseball schedules that Royal also wanted. Texas teams needed to play more games and he committed to getting those changes, along with the change in golf competition to stroke play, or he would recommend the UT golf program be removed from SWC competition altogether. During the spring of 1970, Texas played national tournaments, then competed in and won the Southwest Conference title.

By June 1971, Hannon's Longhorns were competing in stroke play events rather than in Southwest Conference matches, and the wisdom of change was evident at nationals.

In a field that included Bruce Lietzke, Lanny Wadkins, Tom Watson and Andy North, UT came from 15 shots back of tournament leader Florida's pace in the third round. At close of business, Texas won the NCAA Championship team title, beating the University of Houston by seven strokes and Florida by 10. Ben Crenshaw won the individual title with a 72-hole total 273, 15-under par.

"My college years, of which there were three, I had the benefit of knowing coach Hannon even before I went to UT," said Crenshaw. "He was golf pro at both places I played. He seems stern but under that veneer is a soft heart. But we knew he was a fighter and that he expected us to be and we always knew who and what we were fighting for.

"I thought he was a bit like Harvey, but whenever he spoke of golf, his words were all well thought out and very sound and there was nothing extraneous. Always sound advice. He would study things for awhile, and he was not verbose. No mumbo-jumbo about it at all. Some guys who came to UT to play took awhile to understand his humor. He always had a twinkle in his eye and a smile. We were all playing really hard for him."



Hannon with former players Tom Kite, Ben Crenshaw and Brent Buckman.

"I thought he was a bit like Harvey, but whenever he spoke of golf, his words were all well thought out and very sound and there was nothing extraneous. Always sound advice. He would study things for awhile, and he was not verbose. No mumbo-jumbo about it at all. Some guys who came to UT to play took awhile to understand his humor. He always had a twinkle in his eye and a smile. We were all playing really hard for him."

—Ben Crenshaw

Hannon recalled the team being five shots behind Houston and four behind Florida at the end of the first nine on the final day. After the 13th hole, UT was ahead of Houston and Florida lost 10 shots on the last two holes to finish third. Tom Kite set the pace with a sizzling round and the others fed off his success.

The coach understated the obvious, saying "It was a tremendous team effort."

Golf Law

George Hannon kept a diary of his golf life since 1942. The opening page of the diary notes his course of college study, class times, etc. Starting on the third page, he wrote about golf "rules."

1) Grip; 2) Addressing the Ball; 3) Posture and Set

Up; 3) Aim and Ball Position; 5) Waggle and Forward Press; 6) Tension; 7) Balance; 8) Swing; 9) Pre-shot routine.

Hannon wrote, "I do not profess to be an expert on golf rules, human nature, teaching, but I do have some experience and training in this business. I consider myself a knowledgeable person in these areas. I do not know everything."

All this may be true, but the world would be hard-pressed to find someone who cared as deeply for the game and the people that play it.

One of Hannon's players summed it up, saying, "Coach, they don't know how good you are."

Having been a student of Harvey Penick since Hannon was an undergraduate, there is no doubt Penick was an influence on Hannon's theories. Harvey influenced every person he came in contact with and each person took away his or her own version of the Penick style.

Hannon wrote in the diary: "Harvey didn't have a college education, but he was a master at dealing with and handling people! His approach was simple yet effective."

Penick and Hannon both liked golfers: the good, the bad, the hard-working and especially the young. Hannon is particularly fond of junior golfers and for many years was a rules fixture at American Junior Golf Association competitions.

Quietly effective in conversations, Hannon comes across as somewhat shy and, at times, crotchety. But he believes people seek advice or counsel when and if they need it, and the worst thing a golfer can do is listen to too many voices at one time. Each person is different

TEXAS LEGENDS

George Hannon

and the same tools do not work for everyone.

Penick's first law of golf became Hannon's: "Harvey taught people, not golf."

Questioned about a modern electronic contraption that is being pitched to teach junior golfers by computer, Hannon grumbled that the product's promoters were just out to make money and that is no way to teach.

Who is checking the kid's grip?

Which brings us to the first of Hannon's Laws: If you want to lose a student fast, just change his grip. It is difficult to make a grip change and almost impossible to accomplish with a mature player. Better get it right while still a youngster.

Hannon prefers a neutral grip, although he believes that since everyone's hands are different, the grip is not one-size-fits-all. He prescribed a grip based on the position of the palms when a person stands erect with his hands at his sides. How the left hand hangs is how he places it on the club.

There is a "V" created by the thumb and forefinger, and that "V" can point anywhere from the right side of the chin to the right shoulder, depending on the individual. The right hand is then laid on top of the left so that the "V" formed by that thumb and forefinger points the same way as the left hand.

To check a grip, the golfer should put a golf tee in each "V" and the tee should point down the shaft of the club.

Hannon has employed an individualistic approach to teaching people, as well as coaching golf teams with very different personalities. Each individual had a role to play, and every member of the team was essential.

In 1971, the NCAA Championship Longhorns team consisted of Kite, Crenshaw, George Tucker, George Machock and William Cromwell, who is currently president of Crenshaw's club in Austin. Four of them were Austin residents, and Tucker was from San Antonio.

"Bill Cromwell was such a dependable team member. My father knew Mr. Machock (George Machock's dad), who was friends with Jimmy Deimaret and a golfer at a young age. We had a heck of a



Hannon with his wife, Jo, and longtime friend Dorrell Royal.

'My college years could not have been nicer or more fun. It was such a great experience to win the first NCAA with all the people around me who were friends. I could not have asked for anything more. I will always be indebted to coach Hannon and Jo.'

—Ben Crenshaw

team in the early '70s and it freed Tom and I up a lot."

No one need explain what roles Kite and Crenshaw played. They fed off one another's love of competition that began when they were junior golfers. Kite, a junior, was the captain, but Tucker was the glue that kept the team together. "George Tucker, whom I have great respect for, solidified the team," said Crenshaw. "George's parents would come to all the tournaments and bring Evelyn (their dog) and we won every time she came out. Coach (UH's Dave) Williams did not like to see the dog come out to tournaments."

Tucker was a consistent player who always scored around par for and was an excellent third man.

"Any four of the

five scores we posted at the NCAA's would have won the title," Hannon said.

In 1972, the NCAA Champion UT team consisted of Kite, Crenshaw, Tucker, Tony Pfaff, and Brent Buckman, who was Crenshaw's roommate in Ben's second year at UT. The 'Horns brought a second NCAA title back to Austin. Crenshaw and Kite tied for the individual honors in 1972 and in 1973 Crenshaw won the individual title again.

There is no doubt that Hannon had exemplary golfers on both teams, but there is more to winning than basic talent.

Hannon's Law: If ability was the only prerequisite, there would not be many people playing this game.

Consider Ben Hogan, for instance. His older brother Royal was much more coordinated and thought by many to be a natural. Royal Hogan won several Colonial Country Club championships and held his own in a few Colonial Invitational tournaments. In the end, however, he was a businessman golfer, and Ben became a golf icon.

The difference? Desire and practice.

Hannon's Law: Golf is a game that is meant to be played! Don't spend all your time on the practice tee.

Penick would have added—to paraphrase—if you keep at something long enough, you will find a way to mess it up.

Golf is first and foremost a game meant to be enjoyed. Part of the enjoyment comes from playing with others, competition, smelling the roses. Add to this the fact that some people are bored stiff by standing

George Hannon

TEXAS LEGENDS



George Hannon was recognized for his accomplishments as Texas men's golf coach by the Texas Legislature in 2001. Shown here, from left, are Rep. Edmund Kuempel, Chuck Munson, Mark Bedillion, Brent Buckman, Hannon and his wife Jo, Tim Wilson and Jaime Beaman. All of the men played for Hannon.

on a practice tee beating balls.

Then, there are the others for whom repetition is its own reward. Coach Hannon had videotape of the Texas golf team on the practice tee at a tournament. Crenshaw took a few swings, turned to say hello to someone, hits another shot. Meanwhile, Kite is swinging at practice balls non-stop. Both were good golfers before they got to UT and both were famous by the time they left Austin.

Hannon says, "Ben Crenshaw didn't get better playing collegiately. He got smarter."

Kite, on the other hand, has continued to improve in small ways his entire career and has made numerous alterations in his swing. Recognizing the differences in how people learn is part of developing good players and competition helps in that development.

"My college years could not have been nicer or more fun," said Crenshaw. "It was such a great experience to win the first NCAA with all the people around me who were friends. I could not have asked for anything more. I will always be indebted to coach Hannon and Jo."

Hannon's Law: When you reach the point that you know it all—the game has passed you by.

This theory is based on a quote from David Forgan's Creed. Forgan, a well-known club maker at St. Andrews, Scotland, said: "Golf is a science, the study of a lifetime, in which you may exhaust yourself but never your subject."

Hannon notes that not many golfers make it to the top rung. They may be good athletes but they don't have the dedication and desire to work toward improving their games.

Hannon's Law: There are only two things you can do to a shot—hit it or miss it—so it really shouldn't take much time to do either.

There is no hate in George Hannon, but if there were, it would be aimed at slow play. He says that one hour gets added to a round of golf automatically when the word "tournament" is mentioned. His remedy is to have a routine, stick to it no matter what, and clear your brain of unnecessary clutter.

Perhaps that is easier said than done, but Hannon truly believes in people. The best example of that belief lives in that aforementioned former UT golf team member, Brent Buckman.

"I was a freshman at UT and was clueless as to how to get on the golf team," Buckman said. "I was from Kansas City, Missouri. I did not know anyone in Austin and Coach and Jo Hannon opened their hearts and home to me."

Literally. When golfers were not able to go home for Thanksgiving or other holidays, they were always welcome at Hannon House.

Hannon encouraged Buckman to walk on and try to qualify and, according to Buckman, "He always had more confidence in me than I did."

Now a PGA professional, Buckman continued, "Coach wanted everyone to do their best to help the team. He would tell us to hand in the best card we could. He knew we were all working our butts off to be a part of the team. He would say, 'Hey, Buck, you can do it.' And the reward was a guy like me got to be a part of a special experience."

George Hannon has held every office in the Southern Texas PGA. He is a rules "expert," a good instructor and a successful businessman. He will turn 88 in 2012. **TL**



TEACHING PEOPLE, NOT GOLF

40 years after Texas won the 1971 NAAs, we look at the methods of coach George Hannon

Story begins on page 59