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Newsletter and Book Review for the Serious Collector

Bobby Locke

“Old Muffin Face” *the New York Times* called him. He was also described as “heavy-jowled,” and “chubby-faced.” Peter Alliss said he “looked 55 since he was 30.” Who is this fading golfer, who wore knickers and a tie while playing and tipped his cap to the gallery when they applauded? It is the South African Arthur D’Arcy (“Bobby”) Locke.



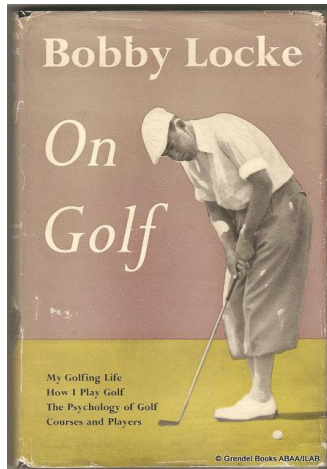
A beaming Bobby Locke holding the Claret Jug

Often referred to as the best putter of all time, Locke used a 45-year old hickory shafted putter given to him by his father. He had an unconventional stroke in both his full swing and on the greens. Locke won the Open Championship four times. In his 1949 Open victory he beat Harry Bradshaw of Ireland by a run-away 12 strokes in a playoff at Royal St. George’s in 1949, which in the pre-TV era was a 36 hole playoff! Locke also won a PGA tournament in Chicago in 1948 by a margin of 16 strokes, still a record.

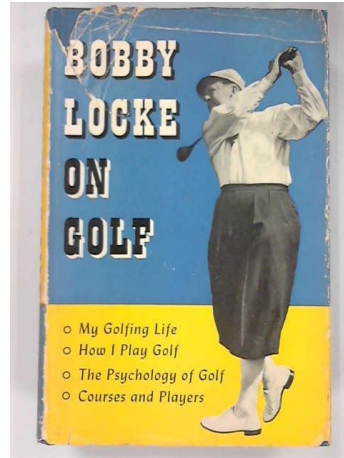
Locke’s seminal book is *Bobby Locke on Golf* (D & J L14380) published in 1953 by Country Life in London with a foreword written by Bernard Darwin. Locke discusses his putting style in the book, “More putts are missed because they are started on the wrong line.” His advice is still quite relevant today that you should keep your head down, “You just hit it and listen.” His ultimate summation of what made him a good putter, “Putting is about confidence.”

Locke’s unconventional style had him taking the putter back inside the target line with a closed stance and a hooded clubface to put overspin on the ball. Locke’s philosophy, “If a ball has true topspin, there are three entrances to the hole – the front door and two side

doors.” His unorthodox style included his full swing as well, he is said to have hooked every shot he hit. Peter Alliss describes his ball flight as a “looping flight moving at least 45 degrees back to the fairway, and says he, “Played with a closed stance and aimed well to the right.”



Simon and Schuster edition



Country Life edition

His book was also published in the United States the year following its British publication (1954) by Simon & Schuster (D & J L14410). Copies of the book are difficult to find. A reprint edition was produced in 2002 by the Memorial Tournament in a limited edition of 250 copies, this book also being difficult to find.

Bobby Locke on Golf is part autobiography, part instruction manual and part Locke talking about his philosophy with historical insights. The book has over 200 photographs, including Locke at many stages in his life and one with him and his “good friend Bob Hope.” The last part of the book is particularly interesting. Locke describes his “ideal” eclectic golf course with various holes from courses all over the world. He includes Augusta’s second hole, Royal Melbourne’s third, Wentworth’s eleventh, Durban Country Club’s seventeenth and the eighth hole at Tam O’Shanter Club in Chicago, a par three of 230 yards.

Locke was banned from the PGA tour in 1949 because after he won the Open Championship he withdrew from an upcoming event he was scheduled to play in at Inverness in Toledo. At the time, the P.G.A. only extended invitations to foreign players who were in the country for short visits and even then such invitations were rare. Although banned from the PGA tour he was invited to Augusta in 1949. Locke called the ban “silly and a disgrace.”

Locke’s strong and feisty personality comes through in *Bobby Locke on Golf*, in particular his relationship with Americans, which was difficult. He discusses how he was asked about his winnings and refused to discuss them. The next day the headline in the paper blasted him for refusing to discuss it. He comments in the book, “the Americans go in for hard hitting” and he’s not talking about their ball striking abilities. And, “The Americans are, of course, intensely interested in dollars; perhaps intensely is not quite a

strong enough word.” Seems like a strong enough word to me. To his credit, he knew his limitations. As he states, “There are people who regard me as off-hand, even surly, when I am playing golf. But golf is my business. When I am playing I must concentrate to the utmost.” From a temperament standpoint Locke comes across as the Colin Montgomerie of his generation, and describes several incidents at the end of the book where the crowds or comments upset him or he snapped back at fans.

He criticizes the British system of professional golf as being ‘closed’ and ‘exclusive’ and thinks American golfers resort to too much gamesmanship and trickery during matches. John Derr describes Locke as “hearing a different drummer in his band.” In 1947 *Time* magazine wanted to feature Locke on its cover, but he turned them down because they wouldn’t pay him. Locke would only do interviews he got paid for; he typically charged \$100.

Bobby Locke on Golf is a thoroughly enjoyable and entertaining read, giving great insight into a golfer who we should remember as one of the best of the twentieth century. Along with *The Walter Hagen Story* and *Down the Fairway*, it is one of the three most interesting autobiographies in golf literature.

Locke also wrote several softcover items: *Golf Hints* (D & J L14500) is a four page brochure produced in Sydney in 1953. *Golf Hints* (D & J L14530) is a 36 page softcover produced in 1955, *How to Improve Your Putting* (D & J L14560) was produced by Dunlop Tire in 1949 and is nine pages. The final item is *The Basis of My Game* (D & J L14590), produced by Slazengers in 1950 and is 8 pages.

Ronald Norval produced a biography of Locke in 1951 titled *King of the Links: The Story of Bobby Locke* (D & J N16780).