

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# Peter Alliss' Golf Heroes

Peter Alliss

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# Peter Alliss' Golf Heroes

Peter Alliss



# SEVE BALLESTEROS

## FACT FILE

**Full name:** Severiano Ballesteros Sota

**Born:** 9 April 1957; Pedrena, Nr Santander, Spain

**Tournament wins:** 93

USA 6

Europe 51

Other 36

**Majors:** 5

Masters 2 (1980; 1983)

US Open 0 (3rd, 1987)

The Open 3 (1979; 1984; 1988)

US PGA 0 (5th, 1984)

**US money list wins:** 0

Highest: 18th in 1983

**European order of merit wins:** 6

1976; 1977; 1978; 1986; 1988; 1991

**Highest world ranking:** 1

5 times (total 60 weeks) 1986-89

**Ryder Cup record:**

Appearances & Team Wins (W)

8 (1979-95/3W); captain

(non-playing) 1997 (1W)

Matches (Won-Lost-Halved) 37 (20-12-5)

Wins (Singles-Foursomes-Fourballs) 20 (2-10-8)

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UNTIL SEVE CAME along, Arnold Palmer was the most exciting and charismatic golfer I had ever seen. However, with his dark good looks, flashing smile and incredible skills, Seve lifted the game through the 1970s and 1980s. He was fallible, he smashed the ball with all his might, went boldly for flags when they were placed in virtually impossible positions, escaped from monstrous situations, and always there was that dashing smile to captivate all and sundry.

The interesting thing about Ballesteros is that he came from the 'wrong end' of Spain. Golf had boomed on the Costa del Sol in the mid-1960s. The growth of the game there has been quite extraordinary: over the last 40 years golf courses have sprung up like mushrooms in a fertile field. That's not to say that golf was unheard of in the north, though. Seve was born in Pedrena, not a million miles away from Santander, a thriving seaport not far from the French border and the exotic town of Biarritz. Seve's family were involved in the game. His uncle, Ramon Sota, was a player of some note, and in spite of a rather ponderous style had many fighting qualities which his young nephew took on board, honed and improved.

Seve made rapid progress once he got himself a couple of proper golf clubs, and broke 80 for the first time when he was just twelve. Before his seventeenth birthday Seve turned pro, the youngest person ever to do so in Spain. His first tournament as a pro was the Spanish PGA Championship. He was not successful there and was in fact disappointed three times in a row, but then he won the Spanish Under-25 Championship. That year he won over £3,000, and by the time 1975 had ended he had risen to 26th place in the Order of Merit but remained unnoticed -

except by one professional, the mighty Roberto de Vicenzo, who had seen him play on a number of occasions and talked endlessly of this young player and his tremendous promise.

In 1975 the Open Championship was played at Carnoustie. Seve failed to make the final 36 holes, but 1976 saw a definite move in the right direction. He finished well in both the Portuguese and the Spanish Opens, but an early appearance in the PGA Championship at Royal St George's in Kent led to opening rounds of 84 and 78 and, hardly surprisingly, he failed to make the cut. Come the Open in July at Royal Birkdale, though, Seve opened up with a 69, which put him in a tie for the lead with Christy O'Connor Jr and Norio Suzuki of Japan. Although O'Connor's uncle, the fabled Christy Senior, had threatened many times to win the championship, and indeed deserved at least one victory, neither Christy Junior, Suzuki or Seve were expected to be in serious contention after the second round.

Seve started his second round rather fitfully and dropped several strokes, but on the inward nine he put together a tremendous birdie run for another 69. This put him two strokes ahead of Johnny Miller. Seve was paired with Miller for the rest of the championship, and in the third round he again made a poor start and was two behind by the end of the first nine. He promptly birdied the 10th, then hit one of his now fabled vast hooks off the 11th tee. In truth, he was very fortunate the ball was found. There was a comical scene before his second shot, Ballesteros trying to find out in which direction the green lay, but he played a magical shot, found the green, and was once again level with Miller. He eagled the 17th, and at the end of the third round had maintained the two-stroke advantage over the American.

By now people were taking a huge amount of interest. However, the fairytale ended when Miller struck a last-round 66 to win the Open in great style. Seve made a number of unforced errors but finished well with a birdie at the 14th and another eagle at the 17th. The shot most people

remember, though, is the magical chip shot, played with all the cheerful, arrogant abandon of youth, between the two bunkers, over a little hump to the hole side to get his par four at the final hole. It was not the most spectacular shot Seve has ever played, but, as it turned out, he needed to get down in two to tie Jack Nicklaus for second place. Seve had arrived, and Seve knew he had.

He went on to win the Dutch Open, and later the Lancôme in France, where the manner of his victory played a big role in the creation of the legend of Seve. Arnold Palmer held a four-stroke lead and did nothing wrong over the homeward stretch, hitting every green in regulation, but Seve birdied five holes and was home in 31 for a one-shot victory. And then he won the World Cup for Spain in partnership with Manuel Pinero.

Seve was becoming a world star, but not in his home country. The attitude of the Spanish public towards his golfing achievements was virtually non-existent. It rankled Seve, perhaps even to this day. Still, he went from strength to strength, although there were disappointments along the way. He certainly should have won the Masters in 1986 when Jack Nicklaus became the oldest player to win that event. He was virtually home and dry, then dumped his second shot at the 15th in the water in front of the green, and that was that.

How much that affected his future play is hard to tell, but after that he was, in many people's eyes, never quite the player he once was.

Seve was feisty by nature and had many a run-in with his fellow competitors, some of whom thought he had more than a modicum of gamesmanship in his personality. He was accused of coughing at inappropriate moments and getting in players' eye lines during putts - always looking to take advantage of the rules. Well, he certainly wasn't alone there. It was his huge desire to be the best that drove him on. He battled with authority, didn't feature in half the



number of Ryder Cup teams he could have played for, and his record in America was far inferior to a number of other players of modest talent by comparison. If Seve Ballesteros at his peak wasn't the best player in the world, he was certainly the most exciting, and everywhere outside the United States he always started as firm favourite.

He married Carmen and they soon started a family. Carmen was the daughter of one of Spain's leading bankers, and a story is told that her mother was not keen on Carmen marrying someone whom she classed (so it is said) only a step or two above a caddy. The marriage, though, appears to be very strong, and although Seve's game has slumped dramatically in the last years, his skills look almost identical to those of years ago when he was winning everything in sight. His short game is still magical but, unfortunately, from the tee he's never quite sure in which direction the ball is going to fly. It's hard to imagine that in the course of the last year or so, the beginning of a new millennium, out of all the tournaments Seve entered, he didn't qualify for the last day on more than a handful of occasions, yet still he practised hard, the desire so obviously still there. How draining that must have been!

He doesn't really have to keep playing. Although Seve has a reputation for being very careful with his money, it is said his wife has inherited tens of millions of dollars from her family, so there's no danger of not being able to have a decent Sunday lunch with an appropriate glass of wine in the years ahead.

He was an inspirational Ryder Cup captain in 1997, running about like a mother hen, much to the annoyance of some of his players, but he had a lot to prove. The matches were played at Valderrama in southern Spain, for the first time outside Great Britain. It had to be a success, and it was, but having captained once, he said 'No, thank you very much' to a second stint, although I did notice that he hinted that he may come back if asked in future years.

I wonder what lies ahead. I can't honestly see him taking part in the Senior Tour in the United States in six or seven years' time, but you never know, by then he may have found the secret of hitting the ball straight again. Golf has been enhanced by the presence of Seve Ballesteros, a player of enormous talent and with that special presence given to so few. Perhaps his most extraordinary victory was his last Open at Royal Lytham & St Annes in 1988, when he defeated Nick Price by one stroke. Seve was magnificent, but how sorry many of us felt for Nick Price, who started the day with a two-stroke lead, had a final round of 68 and was beaten by Seve who went round in 65 - quite remarkable, and one of the great last-round confrontations in championship golf. His contribution to British and European golf will be remembered for ever more. How I wish he could have one last hurrah.

# BILLY CASPER

## FACT FILE

**Full name:** William Earl Casper, Jr

**Born:** 24 June 1931; San Diego, California, USA

**Tournament wins:** 68

USA 51

Europe 1

Other 8

US Senior 8

**Majors:** 3

Masters 1 (1970 after play-off)

US Open 2 (1959; 1966 after play-off)

The Open 0 (4th 1968)

US PGA 0 (2nd 1958; T2nd 1965; 2nd 1971)

US Senior Open 1 (1983)

**US money list wins:** 2

1966 & 1968

**Ryder Cup record:**

Appearances & Team Wins (W)

8 (1961-75/7W); captain

(non-playing) 1979 (1W)

Matches (Won-Lost-Halved) 37 (20-10-7)

Wins (Singles-Foursomes-Fourballs) 20 (6-8-6)

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CASPER IS POSSIBLY one of the most under-rated golfers of the last 50 years. His record of victories, particularly in the United States, is staggering. This was mainly down to the quality of his straight driving – although he tended, rather like Bobby Locke, to draw the ball from right to left on to the fairway – and his fine judgement of distance, allied to a beautiful touch around the greens. Indeed, once on the prepared surface, there was no better putter. It's interesting to watch old films of him and, indeed, many of the other great players of the day and note how wristy they were when putting – entirely taboo today, probably due to the fact that most greens now resemble billiard tables, so it's just a question of smoothly rolling the ball towards the target rather than giving it a crisp smack.

Casper's an interesting character for many reasons, not least of which is the number of children he and his wife Shirley adopted. Having had a family of their own, they decided to adopt less privileged children, particularly from the Far East. I'm pretty sure they got into double figures, which must have put a bit of a strain on the housekeeping money, particularly as one or two business deals Billy was involved with didn't work out as handsomely as he had hoped. Tragedy struck at the end of the 1990s when one of these adopted children was arrested on a number of charges concerning drugs, theft and – the ultimate sin – murder, for which he was given a life sentence, or, in American terminology, 455 years, although I'm not quite sure how one is supposed to serve out that time. Perhaps it's just their rather unique method of saying you ain't coming out again, son!

Although he was such a family man, he didn't have a great reputation for being very sociable. Still, he captained the Ryder Cup team and played in it on eight occasions. He and I had some titanic battles which, come the end of our

international careers, resulted in us being just about all square. The wonderfully refreshing thing about Casper was that he got on with the game, he played at a brisk pace. How he would cope with today's slowness is beyond my comprehension, but no doubt he would. He was a very good tactical player and could keep his nerve under the most trying circumstances. This quality manifested itself to the greatest extent when he won the US Open Championship at the Olympic Club in San Francisco in the mid-1960s. Arnold Palmer was the obvious favourite, umpteen strokes ahead with nine holes to play, but for some inexplicable reason he went to pieces. Some say he was going for all sorts of records, but I'm not sure that was true; he just played some poor shots, got careless, let his mind wander, and ended up tying with Billy Casper. During the play-off, once again Palmer was well in the lead with nine to go, and once again he followed that with some poor shots. Casper was the eventual winner, a wonderful achievement against the American golfing hero of the day and a tremendously biased crowd.

After his marvellous career on the main tour, he turned to the Senior ranks and continued to dominate for a number of years. Now 70 years of age he still, on occasion, takes his clubs out from under the stairs to perform in selected tournaments. By now, it must be said, he's more or less a curiosity for the young people who, I'm sure, can hardly believe when they look at his enormous girth that he was once one of the world's great stars. Billy has always had a weight problem, regularly going from looking like a matinée idol to two-ton Billy from Boston. He used to put himself on exotic diets, including one based on buffalo steaks.

But look at the overall number of tournaments won in the United States, and his major victories, and you'll see why Billy Casper has a rightful place in the pages of this book. One is left to wonder why he didn't travel better and win a good many more international events.

# BOB CHARLES

## FACT FILE

**Full name:** Robert James Charles, CBE, OM

**Born:** 14 March 1936;  
Carterton, New Zealand

**Tournament wins:** 53  
USA 5  
Europe 8  
Other 17  
US Senior 23

**Majors:** 1  
Masters 0 (T15th 1963)  
US Open 0 (3rd 1964; 1970)  
The Open 1 (1963 after play-off)  
US PGA 0 (T2nd 1968)  
Senior British Open 2 (1989; 1993)

**US money list wins:** 0  
Highest: 11th in 1967  
US Senior Tour 2 1988; 1989

**European order of merit wins:** 0  
Highest: 4th 1962

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BOB CHARLES IS in this book for a couple of reasons, one of them the fact that he is the only left-handed golfer to date to win a major championship – the Open at Royal Lytham & St Annes in 1963. Charles, now well into his late sixties, still plays amazingly well on the main Senior Tour in the United States. He's one of the Tour's most prolific winners and, apart from a head of white hair, looks pretty much the same as he did 40 years ago. He was always a meticulous man, one of the best-dressed professionals on and off the golf course – the shoes always beautifully cleaned, a knife crease in the trousers, a well-blended yet subtle combination of colours – with a quiet demeanour and a wonderful putting stroke. I've seen many great putters over the years and it's very difficult to pick out the best, but Charles would be right up there at the top of the tree along with Bobby Locke and Billy Casper.

Charles joined Mark McCormack's IMG very early on in his career, and what a good move that was, for no one came close to challenging him as the world's leading left-handed player. Winning the Open Championship opened a huge number of golfing doors for him. Left-handed players had been pretty poorly catered for over the years, but Charles signed up with some of the biggest golf club manufacturers in the world. It's interesting to note that a world star could have his name on a set of clubs that sold in Australia and a different one that sold in the United States, and the same with the UK and Europe, so you could – and this is where IMG were quite brilliant – have contracts with several companies. Of course you only used the relevant equipment according to which country you were in. This was also the case as far as golf bags were concerned. You would have a contract for carrying a Slazenger, a Dunlop, a Wilson, a MacGregor or whatever bag in one country while using another manufacturer's clubs. It sounds complicated but it really wasn't. It was just a brilliant ploy on Mark

McCormack's part to earn more money for his clients and ultimately push up his percentages!

Charles was also one of those professionals lucky enough to have a wonderful wife, Verity - a quiet lady, perhaps a little long-suffering as Bob moved through life slowly and gently. One had the feeling that sometimes he'd sit polishing his shoes for an hour to make sure the shine was just right when perhaps Verity was longing to go to the local Palais for a quickstep. And if that was out of the question, perhaps a slow foxtrot, or even a hug and shuffle! Somehow I don't think those occasions came along too often! They were, and still are, very much a together couple, though, just nice people, and I'm so glad they have both played a small but significant part in my golfing life.

Bob's position as the world's top left-hander is now being seriously challenged by Canadian Mike Weir and Americans Phil Mickelson and Steve Flesch. I don't think it will be too long before one of them wins one of the world's majors.



# HENRY COTTON

## FACT FILE

**Full name:** Sir Thomas Henry Cotton

**Born/died:**

b 26 January 1907; Holmes Chapel,  
Cheshire, England

d 22 December 1987; London, England

**Tournament wins:** 32

USA 1

Europe 30

Other 1

**Majors:** 3

Masters 0 (T13th 1957)

US Open Did not complete

The Open 3 (1934; 1937; 1948)

US PGA Did not compete

**European order of merit wins: 1 1938**

**Ryder Cup record:**

Appearances & Team Wins (W)

3 (1929-47/OW

- inc playing captain 1947); captain (non-playing) 1953 (0W)

Matches (Won-Lost-Halved) 6 (2-4-0)

Wins (Singles-Foursomes) 2 (2-0)

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HENRY COTTON WAS born in Holmes Chapel in the county of Cheshire in 1907, and throughout his life he played a major role in the development of British professional golf.

Most golf professionals up to the middle part of the twentieth century were connected with the game of golf through their role as caddies. When the game began to flourish in the middle of the nineteenth century, the 'toffs' of the day would notice the skills of some of the young caddies and become their mentor-patrons. Before long, matches with large sums of money at stake were being organised. Thus professional tournaments began, and the great triumvirate of Vardon, Taylor and Braid emerged.

Cotton's background was very different from those that had gone before. He was definitely middle class and had had a public-school education at Alleyn's in Dulwich, south-east London. It was while at this school that he decided he would like to become a golf professional – a very bold step for the son of an iron foundry owner who I'm sure must have felt his son could have had a very pleasant life playing golf as an amateur. His father took him to see J. H. Taylor (one of the great stalwarts of the game) to have the boy's skills assessed. The main thing J.H. appeared to notice was the fierce concentration Cotton was able to apply to each shot, and he told Cotton Senior that he thought the boy had promise.

Cotton was not a natural golfer and had to work hard to develop his swing, but he seemed to enjoy the hundreds of hours of practice he put in. It was even suggested at the time that he practised until his hands bled. I'm not always sure I believe these stories; after all, to try to hit golf balls with blistered hands is very uncomfortable. If you get to the stage where they're bleeding and you still continue, you're certifiable!

In those days there was no such thing as a professional golfer, you had to be a golf professional. The difference? You couldn't be freelance, you had to be attached to a golf club, and Cotton's first job was that of assistant at the Fulwell Golf Club in Middlesex. He wasn't there long, and when he moved it was to the delightful links course at Rye in East Sussex. It was here he had more time to play and practise but, remember, he was still very young. By the age of nineteen he was the full professional at the Langley Park Golf Club - an amazing rate of progress by anybody's standards. He learnt to stock the shop, how to trade and to give lessons, but right from day one he set his stall out differently from the rest of his fellow professionals: Cotton was dedicated and determined. Many people would say, however, that Cotton was far from being the ideal club professional, but he always had very good staff looking after things whenever he was absent.

He made his first appearance in the Open Championship in 1926 with no great success, but the following year he played very well over the first 36 holes at St Andrews and went on to finish eighth. Winning the championship had now become his main aim, but it seemed that whenever Americans visited our shores they won as a matter of course. In the late 1920s Cotton decided to try his luck in the United States. He learnt much, including the value of being able to hit the ball from right to left. He had invested £300 in the trip and came back with his money intact.

The major change in the fortunes of young Henry Cotton, now 24, came in 1931. He, Aubrey Boomer and my father, Percy Alliss, were not included in the Ryder Cup team travelling to America because they were not resident in the UK. (That looks a strange rule now when you consider they were three of the best players of their day but were still excluded.) Father was signed up, for a considerable fee, by the Express to send back reports of the golf; Cotton and