

SEVE

GOLF'S FLAWED GENIUS
The Updated Definitive Biography



Robert
Green

*'The world of Seve I never knew.
Absolutely riveting'* Peter Alliss

SEVE - Now a
Major Motion Picture



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About the Author

Robert Green is the Editor in Chief of *Golf International* magazine. He has been the recipient of three British Sports Journalism Awards and is the author of four previous books on golf, including *Trouble Shooting*, an instruction book written with Seve, with whom he also scripted an instruction video. His own golf is not of genius level, although he has inflicted himself on over 400 golf courses on five continents, bringing greenkeepers around the world to their knees. Somehow, he once won a golf writers' tournament. He lives in Islington, North London, with his wife and several putters.

Seve: Golf's Flawed Genius

A golfing legend with five major championships to his credit, Severiano Ballesteros was one of the game's great heroes – charismatic, charming, fiery, unpredictable. His untimely death in May 2011 after a prolonged struggle with cancer, left his sport bereft.

Over the course of Seve's career, no other golf writer enjoyed such regular contact with him as Robert Green – meetings, interviews, conversations and meals together, all of which led to a video and a golf instruction book. This book draws on the material and insights gathered during those collaborative years to capture the 'real Seve'. It describes his family and upbringing in Spain and recalls his great on-course triumphs – not least his enormous role in the revival of the fortunes of the Ryder Cup, which thanks to him is today one of the world's great sporting events – as well as his calamities. Dramatically and insightfully, Green recalls the great wins in the Open and the Masters, and also those titles that excruciatingly slipped from Seve's grasp.

The book also examines Seve's darker side: his controversial and very public spats with officialdom and his sometimes tempestuous private life, including his divorce from Carmen, the daughter of one of Spain's wealthiest men and mother of his three children, to whom he was married for 17 years. And even after his death, his legacy could not rest.

Above all, though, it is Seve the golfer who takes centre stage, resulting in a portrait that does full justice to its colourful and mercurial subject. It is a story which will enthrall all those who watched and admired this golfing icon throughout his remarkable career.

SEVE

Golf's Flawed Genius

Robert Green

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For Jane, Ben and Sam

'Do you want to know the great drama of my life? It's that I have put my genius into my life; all I've put into my works is my talent.'

Oscar Wilde



Introduction

Getting to Know the Man

In November 2007, his playing career consigned to history, Severiano Ballesteros was the recipient of the Trofeo Driver Award, given annually by the Basque Golf Federation. The presentation was in San Sebastian and naturally, they got José Maria Olazábal, his long-time Ryder Cup partner and compatriot, who was born just outside the city, to do the honours. This was teed up as if Olazábal could not be there, and he was shown on film clip apologising for his absence and also apparently taking a phone call from Tiger Woods to arrange a game of golf. José Maria then looked into the camera and said: 'But I can't do that to you', whereupon he walked out from behind the screen to hand over in person the prize to the man who will forever be the genius in-chief of European golf.

I am writing this in July 2014. In its original form, this book was published in 2006, updated two years later. A great deal has happened since then, even though Seve Ballesteros is no longer alive. He died aged 54, in May 2011. Since Europe last won the Ryder Cup in America, for the fourth time ever and on this occasion under the captaincy of Seve's great friend, José Maria Olazábal, in circumstances which cliché almost demands we describe as being an ending which no Hollywood scriptwriter would dare imagine, it really is time to update the tale again.

After Europe retained the Ryder Cup in Chicago on 30 September 2012, Olazábal said to his team at the closing ceremony: 'All men die and not all men live. And you made me feel alive once again this week.' His team applauded wildly. Before he could say more, the (by this time predominantly European-supporting) crowd broke into a spontaneous chant of 'Seve, Seve, Seve, Seve'. After a short pause, Olazábal said: 'I'm very sure he's very happy where he is today.'

In the history of top-level international sport, I doubt that ever before has a posthumous figure been eulogised so frequently, so genuinely and so handsomely by the competition's participants. But that's Seve for you. The story of his immense role in the creation, existence and flourishing of the modern Ryder Cup will be told later on. It was a fundamental contribution, forged in the intense crucible that was Seve's heart and soul.

Olazábal once said to me: 'You may think you are a competitive person, but when you play with Seve, you realise there is another level.' And so it was. In *The Fight*, his book about the extraordinary Muhammad Ali/George Foreman 'Rumble in the Jungle' in Zaire in 1974, Norman Mailer wrote of Ali: 'What is genius but balance on the edge of the impossible?' That's a fitting thought for this book too. Part of Seve's skill was to make the seemingly impossible seem routine. And there was more to the connection than that. Ali was one of Seve's very few idols. A back injury incurred while boxing as a 17-year-old blighted Seve's career; not to the grotesque extent the sport so horribly assaulted Ali's wellbeing, but nevertheless to the long-term detriment of his own special gifts.

And Seve knew about fighting. He fought against class prejudice to gain acceptance at his golf club. He fought for and against the European Tour. He fought America's administrators off the course and its golfers in the Ryder Cup. He fought countless perceived adversaries, some real and some imaginary.

He fought his own technical shortcomings to make himself one of the finest golfers ever, arguably the most charismatically entertaining in the history of the game. At the end, an end that lasted for more than two and a half years, from October 2008 to May 2011, he fought against his illness. Oh yes, the fight was something Seve was hugely familiar with. It was sometimes said that his best position was beside himself.

The fight was his motivation and inspiration to greatness. What highlights there were. There was his first Open Championship title, in 1979; two triumphs in the Masters, three years apart; victory in the 1984 Open at St Andrews, the circumstance of his most glorious pomp; his Open triumph on his return to Lytham in 1988, the last of his five major championships; 1995, the year of his last tournament win and the year he played a remarkable role as Europe regained the Ryder Cup in his last appearance in the competition as a player; 1997, the year he captained the European Ryder Cup team, an entity which he did more than anyone else to bring about – to success in Spain.

In July 2007, almost precisely ten years after he captained that victorious Ryder Cup team, Seve announced his retirement from competitive golf. In fact, pretty much from golf, period. At an emotionally charged press conference ahead of the Open Championship at Carnoustie, he explained his decision.

‘For a few months, there was something confused inside of me. There was a fight, internal fight [See, that word again.] My head say, “I think you should retire” ... but my heart was telling me it would be better to continue playing and compete. So it was difficult for quite a while. But finally I decided this year to go and try the Champions Tour [the senior circuit, for over-50 golfers, in America]. So I went there, the weather was nice but I only played one tournament and I came back. So that really made me think deeply and to really question ... and I made probably most difficult decision of my career as a player. I decided to retire.’

He added: ‘I don’t have the desire [anymore]. I’m not willing to give away things that I did before. You have to remember I gave away all my teenage years [to golf]. I worked really hard from morning to night and I put all my energy and effort into the game, focused 100%, and I thought that was enough.’

It was enough to have Tiger Woods, then easily the best golfer in the world, and maybe the greatest ever, to declare: ‘He was a genius.’ You could Google away merrily without finding Tiger paying a compliment of that extent to any other golfer, very recently retired or not. Woods also said: ‘Seve has been probably the most creative player who’s ever played the game. I’ve never seen anyone who had a better short game than him. I’ve been lucky enough to have had an opportunity to pick his brain on several occasions around the greens; watched him hit shot after shot after shot and have him explain how he did it, why he did it. It was just phenomenal.’

That accolade will give you more than a sense of the talent we are talking about here. In the words of another contemporary giant of the modern game, uttered the next day, Ernie Els said: ‘There’s not enough great things I can say about Seve.’ Nor could the press.

One of the reasons Seve enjoyed such spectacularly appreciative coverage in the British media was his inherent understanding of what was wanted of him, even in a foreign culture, although it should be added that he was also mostly good company, entertaining, infectiously mischievous and – not least – that he thrilled even the most bunker-hardened golf writers of a generation with his glorious individual brand of seemingly reckless brilliance. But had any other player alleged that some of the business practices of the European Tour were ‘nearly like a Mafia’, an analogy particularly clumsy given that he was in Italy when he said it, he would have received far harsher coverage at the hands of the press than Seve got. Whether or not he had a point is something we’ll look into later...

In a previous biography, published in 1982, *Seve: The Young Champion*, Dudley Doust wrote that Seve's mind is a 'private forest, a place impenetrable, indeed dangerous to others'. He was a complex character – charming and manipulative, gregarious and withdrawn, open and suspicious, generous and mean – depending on how the mood took him. That's probably a necessary facet of being a flawed genius. It is part of the price you pay, a kind of Faustian pact, for being a champion – the selfishness, the remorselessness, the single-mindedness. Indeed, the phrase 'flawed genius' may be axiomatic. It has to be that way; there's no other sort.

In his much-acclaimed book *In Search of Tiger*, Tom Callahan quoted one Woods-watcher saying of the subject: 'He doesn't want to change anything, because he feels it's all part of the perfect combination of what it takes to be who he is. If he got rid of his meanness, his pettiness, his cheapness it would be like, "Well, maybe I'll lose something then".'

It's a world in which nothing must be given away. It's an attitude which indicates a craving to have a constant reminder of just how tough it was to get this far; it's been a fight, a fight against the odds. Another book, *Bernie's Game* by Terry Lovell, about the Formula 1 supremo Bernie Ecclestone, has the subject haggling for 20 minutes to knock 100 Swiss francs off the price of an expensive toy for one of his daughters. Ecclestone was with his then colleague, Max Mosley, who pointed out to Bernie that his time was not worth so little as that. Ecclestone said he knew, 'but I've got to keep in practice'.

Seve, too, was relentlessly competitive. In 1990, I was working with him on the shooting of an instruction video, *The Short Game*, in Dubai. (For the avoidance of doubt, Seve was hitting the short while I was there to help with the script – to steal the marvellous phrase of the late Peter Cook, that the short game is among the shortest in the world.) While waiting for the film crew to set up again, Seve insisted I try to hit the shot he was practising, something he called the 'parachute shot', a full swing to hit the ball just a few yards, in this case from a poor lie to a hole cut just the other side of a bunker. He explained the technique – open clubface, ball forward, an exaggeratedly wide stance, weight on the right side and so forth – and I had a go. The first one went into the sand. The next finished six inches from the hole. He hadn't hit one as close as that himself. 'See what I mean?' he said. 'It's not hard.' He took the sand-wedge back and had another effort. This one he holed.

That evening, we had dinner at the hotel. We got on to the matter of major championships. At this stage in their respective careers, Seve had won the five he would end up with, Nick Faldo had won two (of his eventual six). Seve said he thought Faldo had been lucky in one respect, and in two instances Paul Azinger had bogeyed the last two holes at Muirfield to enable Faldo's round of 18 consecutive pars to be sufficient to win the 1987 Open, even though he had not started the final day in the lead; Scott Hoch had missed a tiny putt on the first hole of their sudden-death playoff at the 1989 Masters, which meant Faldo was able to go on and win at the next. 'That sort of thing never happened to me in any of my five majors,' Seve said.

We briefly argued back and forth over essentially the same issue – me saying that while I couldn't pretend to understand what it was like to be at the sharp end of a huge golf tournament, I thought Faldo's play under the gun on both occasions had demonstrated that he deserved to win; Seve insisting that he had enjoyed more than his fair share of good fortune. After a few minutes of this, Seve had clearly had enough. 'I thought you'd back down,' he said. Subject over. The truth was that Seve always expected people to back down. Why wouldn't he? They usually did.

Seve was a man who knew what he wanted alright, as I was emphatically to find out a decade or later, through a protracted, at times tortuous, process at the end of which we not only once failed to get his autobiography published, we managed the trick twice. When you're involved with a project like that, you certainly get to know the person with whom you're dealing, at times to unique effect and

frequently in ways you'd have preferred not to encounter.

My first Open Championship as a journalist was the one in which Seve made his distinctive name renowned throughout the sport. He was 19 at the 1976 Open at Royal Birkdale. He was the unknown who took an early lead in the championship. Everyone expected him to disappear from the leaderboards. He didn't. Mostly, he didn't for the next 15 to 20 years. At Birkdale he finished runner-up to Johnny Miller, then possibly the best golfer in the world. Over five different periods in the latter half of the 1980s, Seve was officially ranked the world's No. 1 golfer for a total of 61 weeks. Tiger Woods, Greg Norman and Nick Faldo are the only players who have put in more time at the top.

Of course, it wasn't just that Seve was a great golfer. It was the way he played, attacking the course like Brazil used to play football – 'score three if you like, because we're going to score four'. The manner in which Seve set about his task meant bogeys were almost a certainty. So, too, was the fact that they would invariably be outnumbered by the birdies, and at least one of those per round would be extraordinary. A 'Seve par' became the recognised lingo for making four via the trees and the sand. Indeed, birdies were frequently made the same way.

In a rating of world No.1 golfers in the November 2004 issue of *Golf Digest*, Seve was only given five out of 10 when it came to the soundness of his swing and his ability to minimise mistakes. He got 10 out of 10 for both his putting and for his short game and talent for improvisation. The following underlines those points.

At the 1987 Masters, Seve came to the 72nd hole needing a par to tie the clubhouse leader, Larry Mize, and a birdie to beat him. His drive was perfect. The birdie was a serious possibility; after all, he had just birdied the 17th. With an 8-iron in his hands, Seve then shoved his shot into the right-hand greenside bunker. Now a bogey was on the cards. Or not. 'For anyone else a bunker shot on to the dangerous 18th green with a third Masters victory hanging in the balance would have been unsettling to say the least,' wrote Sarah Ballard in *Sports Illustrated*. 'But Seve in sand is like Brer Rabbit in a briar patch: he's home. Long before he ever played a real golf course, Ballesteros was hitting sand shots on the beach of Pedrena, the village on the shore of the Bay of Santander in the north of Spain that is still his home. The bunker shot stopped six feet away, the putt rolled dead into the heart of the cup...'

Seve never did win that third Masters. Quite shockingly, and very dramatically, Mize beat him and Greg Norman in the ensuing playoff. But in 1988 a third Open Championship was to be his.

So, as the room-service waiter legendarily asked George Best, encamped on his bed with champagne and a glamorous woman, where did it all go wrong? Without the application of too much dramatic licence, you could say it was perhaps on the eve of Seve's first win as a professional – aged 17, the Spanish Under-25s Championship at Pedrena, the club where he learned to play the game. The weather was cold and damp but Seve was so determined to excel that week that he hit hundreds of balls in the miserable conditions, to the extent that he so aggravated his back injury that he considered withdrawing. Instead he played and won – but at a price. A long, lingering price. He always insisted that no one could ever comprehend the degree of pain his back caused him throughout his career. 'I knew from way back that his back was shot,' Nick Faldo told me. 'I remember we were in Japan in the 1980s. He told me that his back was gone. For him, trying to get through the '90s was too much.'

As Seve told Faldo: 'The more I practise, the more I hurt. The less I practise, there goes my game.' Thirty years on from that golf tournament at Pedrena, Seve was involved in an unseemly incident, a scuffle that he instigated, at the same club with a European Tour rules official, José Maria Zamora. That takes us back to the 'Mafia' remark.

But notwithstanding that dispute, the break-up of his marriage, his back problems and his

sometimes less than astute business decisions, his life and career were filled with much happier events too – the five major championships, his vital stimulation of the nascent European Tour, his epic Ryder Cup career. Despite some of the mistakes he made, as well as because of all he contributed to golf especially in Britain and elsewhere in Europe – there was widespread affection and respect for Seve. Even the personal devastation of divorce from his wife, Carmen, the mother of their three children, didn't ravage the rich well of fondness for him. He was not the first famous man to fall into disrepute due to a keen interest in women who were not his wife, and he won't be the last. But, as with other examples, it could have been handled better.

I hope this book will help to bring an accurate portrayal, an unprecedented one, of a complicated character, an extraordinary man, who did more than anyone else to bring excitement, style and verve to the previously pedestrian world of European golf. For those too young to comprehend the impact he had, I can assure you that it was immense. So was he. He may have given up the game before his life was ruined by illness, but the sport of professional golf will surely never give up on his memory.

A Snapshot of Seve

Early afternoon, late September 1987 – the Ryder Cup at Muirfield Village, Dublin, Ohio, the course that Jack Nicklaus built; the venue for the United States' attempt to regain the trophy they had lost at The Belfry in England two years previously, their first such setback in 28 years.

The chief architect of that reverse had been Seve Ballesteros – the man whose emergence as a force in world golf in 1976 at the age of 19 had been instrumental in causing continental European golfers to be invited to join forces with those from Great Britain & Ireland in 1979 after it had finally been conceded that GB&I alone were no match, and certainly no contest, for the United States.

On this warm autumnal day, Seve was playing the first hole in the first series of fourball matches in partnership with his compatriot and Ryder Cup rookie, the 21-year-old José María Olazábal. Over the next two and the ensuing three Ryder Cups, they would go on to prove themselves the greatest pairing in the history of the matches. In the recent past, that very morning's foursomes, they had demonstrated their worth by coming back from 2 down after six holes against Larry Nelson and Payne Stewart to win the last. Europe and the USA were tied at 2–2 going into the afternoon fourballs. This time, the Spaniards were up against Curtis Strange and Tom Kite. On the first green occurred an incident that encapsulated Seve's skill, bravado, what he brought to the Ryder Cup and his oft-expressed antipathy towards Americans.

The identity of his opponents would have had something to do with it. He and Strange had not yet become the best of enemies (Seve had won four major championships to Strange's none at this point) but Strange was touted by the American press as presently the best player in the game, a piece of palpable nonsense largely based on the fact that he was on course to becoming the leading money winner on the US PGA Tour for the second time in three seasons. With Kite, though, Seve did have history – one he subsequently played down, no doubt partly out of respect for the fact that Kite was his opposite number as captain when Seve was effectively the Ryder Cup host, in the match at Valderrama in Spain in 1997. But you don't necessarily have to believe that.

In his book, *Summers With Seve*, published in 1991, Ian Wright, one of Seve's former caddies (not a rare species), wrote: 'So if anyone wants to see Seve wound up and motivated, all they have to do is mention Americans in general or Tom Kite in particular ... whenever Tom Kite's name comes up, watch the bristles rise.'

Nick de Paul had been Seve's caddie when he played against Kite in the singles at the 1985 Ryder Cup. Seve won three of the last five holes to force a half as Europe swept to a tumultuous and comprehensive victory that afternoon. De Paul told Norman Dabell for his book, *How We Won the Ryder Cup*: 'I should have realised I was going to be in for a hard time ... when I saw the draw. Tom Kite had it in for Seve. There was bad blood somewhere...'

Most likely that emanated from the less-than-gracious reception Seve was widely accorded when he first played on the PGA Tour in 1978 – 'he's here to steal our money,' was how Seve characterised the widespread reaction to him – but by 1987 there was something specific. Kite had been paired with Seve during the final round of the 1986 Masters, when Seve had perpetrated the most regrettable shot of his

career, hitting a straightforward 4-iron into the water on the 15th hole to cede the advantage in the tournament to Jack Nicklaus. It was a mistake from which he could not recover that day. To some extent – admittedly this is an exaggeration, albeit not a big one – it was a mistake from which he never recovered. On the opening hole that afternoon, Kite had got involved in an altercation with Seve's caddie and brother, Vicente, which set the mood for the day and for their relationship – at least as it was in 1987.

Fast-forwarding nearly 18 months to the Ryder Cup, this incident still fresh in the mind of Seve, at least, what we had on that first green at Muirfield Village was this. Seve had hit his approach shot short and left of the green, about 40 feet from the pin. Olazábal (sometimes referred to in this book by his nickname Chema, a diminutive of the Basque pronunciation of his name: JoCHE MAria) was on the green, about 20 feet above the hole. Kite, also on the green, had putted first and left his ball about three feet from the hole. Seve was next away but Seve – speaking in Spanish, reasonably enough – elected for Chema to go first with his difficult, slippery downhill putt, which he considered to be a harder shot than his chip. Olazábal left it short and went to mark his ball. Seve, again in Spanish, told him to putt out.

The Americans, not understanding what was being said, asked what the heck was going on. Indeed, Strange seemed so discombobulated that he actually said: “Can you speak in Christian?” More reasonably, he felt Olazábal might be on the ‘comeback line’ of his putt if he went on to putt out. Seve, this time in English so the Americans could understand, said: ‘Don’t worry. This is an easy chip. I’m going to hole it.’ He did. After telling Olazábal to pick up his marker now that his putt was no longer needed, Seve said, loudly enough: ‘Don’t worry. Curtis isn’t going to hole his putt anyway.’ He didn’t. The Spaniards won their match by 2&1, Europe swept the day to lead 6-2, and ultimately they inflicted the first defeat on the Americans on home territory.

I think that incident says much about Seve and will be seen to typify what follows about him in this book: sublime skills and a willingness to embrace confrontation. It illustrates the colossal talent he had, an innate ability that regularly provided vicarious thrills for millions of golf fans around the world. This anecdote may also indicate why there were proportionately fewer of those in the United States than elsewhere.

In Tom Callahan’s *In Search of Tiger*, Woods says of Seve: ‘He’s amazing around the greens. He showed me a few little things. There are some things you can learn only from another player.’ As Arthur Conan Doyle, a quietly keen golfer himself, once said: ‘Mediocrity knows nothing higher than itself, but talent instantly recognises genius.’

A fine Spanish player of the younger generation, Sergio Garcia, paid the compliment like this. ‘You see him doing these little shots. Then you go home and try, and try, and keep trying and trying. But maybe only he can do them.’ No player in the history of golf ever had a better short game than Seve.

Garcia also said: ‘With the heart, I don’t know how anybody can be as good as Seve.’ There was never been any doubting his *côrazon*. No questioning he had the *cojones*, too – except maybe that one lonely time in the middle of the 15th fairway at Augusta on that unlucky 13th day of April 1986, when in fact he lost his ball in the pond. That was four days after his 29th birthday, just over four weeks after the death of his father, and it seemed that the whole world – led by a vengeful PGA Tour and rampant Nicklaus – was out to get him.

Seve’s is a remarkable tale. This is how it began.

How It All Began

The Spanish have a word for it. *Destino*. Given that so much of his career, both highlights and low points, was enjoyed and endured at Augusta National, it was somehow fitting that the birthday of Seve Ballesteros should frequently fall during the week of the Masters Tournament. His 20th was on the Saturday of his first appearance there, in 1977, when two men who would figure large in his golfing life duelled for the title, Tom Watson eventually outgunning Jack Nicklaus. When Seve won there in 1980, the youngest-ever champion until Tiger Woods came along with his own awesome and compelling brand of precocity in 1997, the tournament began the day after he turned 23.

On 9 April, 1957, two days after the Masters had been won by Doug Ford (not a vintage year), the baby Severiano was born in Pedrena, a homely fishing village on the southern shore of the Bay of Santander in Northern Spain, where the drama of the scenery is matched by the ferocious power of the seas in the Bay of Biscay. His parents were Baldomero Ballesteros Presmanes and Carmen Sota Oceja. They named him after his paternal grandfather. His parents and three elder brothers – Baldomero (ten years older), Manuel (plus eight) and Vicente (plus five) – lived in a one-storey house directly above the barn in which they kept their cows.

It was a family of six that should have been seven. His parent's first child was named Manuel. Their second son was Baldomero. One summer's day when Manuel was two, a woman who helped look after the boys was riding with them in a donkey-drawn cart. The animal put its foot in a wasps' nest. Hundreds of them swarmed around the group, stinging incessantly. The woman managed to protect the smallest, Baldomero, but she could not take care of both children. Manuel died three days later, a loss sustained in circumstances too horrible to contemplate. The family's next child was thus christened Manuel.

During the Spanish Civil War, Ballesteros Snr had been on the side of the Franquistas. The Santander region was predominantly Republican, and when in June 1937 Baldomero was recruited against his will to fight Franco, he registered his disgust by shooting himself in the left hand. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison. While in hospital having treatment on his injury, he escaped and went to join Franco's forces. Franco himself would live until 1975, the year after the young Seve would turn pro.

As the baby of the family, Seve was somewhat spoiled by his parents. On the other hand, he got to do the most menial jobs around the farm because his brothers delegated most of those to him. When it came to mucking out the cows, there was seldom much doubt about whose name was on the rota. His pocket money was only five pesetas a week, a sum he would double by selling the crème caramels his mother made for him on to Vicente.

Seve's first display of sporting prowess was as a middle-distance runner, built up by undertaking something like a two-mile run four times a day to and from school – he went home for lunch – which he started when he was seven. He fondly kept the miniature trophy that he had for winning a 1500

metre race when he was 10.

~~After school, he would help his father around the farm, harvesting crops and feeding the cows. Not~~ terribly exciting, but then there wasn't a lot going on in Pedrena, a village with rutted roads and few pavements, in those days. (It's not exactly Madrid today.) There was one place from which you could make a phone call, which meant the operator knew every secret in the village. There was one cinema. There was one taxi and a car, the latter owned by Seve's uncle, Ramon Sota, Spain's most distinguished golfer of the day, who finished sixth at the 1965 Masters. An aptitude for golf was already in the family.

There were three cafes, one of which, El Culebrero, boasted the village's first television. By day Seve would do his best to enjoy the black-and-white thrillers or western adventures imported from Britain or America even though they had been dubbed into Mexican rather than Spanish, which made them hard to follow. By night, when he was no longer allowed inside, he would watch with his face scrunched up against the window pane. Watch meant just that. Since he was standing outside, he couldn't hear a thing.

Don't be entirely fooled by this slightly romantic image of a bygone era. This was post-Franco Spain. The mood in the village could be intimidating and the priests and soldiers were people not to be crossed. You didn't want them to catch you doing anything wrong, or hardly anything at all.

At home, meanwhile, the Ballesteros family had a radio but no television until Manuel, himself a professional golfer, won one in a tournament. As is traditional in those parts, the *montaneses* – people from the mountain regions of Cantabria – are close-knit, putting very much more emphasis on family than friends. Outsiders are inherently regarded with suspicion. That upbringing, while comfortable and cordial, doubtless shaped Seve's attitudes in later life, sometimes for the better and sometimes not. He had a couple of friends at school, but no one very close.

At nights, Seve shared a bed with Vicente in a windowless room. Baldomero and Manuel were in another room, his parents in a third. The dining room and the kitchen were together and there was one bathroom. It wasn't luxury, but there were many people in more straightened circumstances than Seve and his family. And they most likely didn't have a consuming passion in the offing.

It has been written that Seve was born to play golf. His right arm was about an inch longer than his left, just perfect for taking a stance to hold a golf club. Whatever else may be said about his golf game, it was a part of his make up that he took advantage of.

The first item he ever owned to do with golf was an old clubhead. Aged seven, he would find sticks and stones that would make into a shaft by ramming them into the hosel of the clubhead. He would have to use stones and pebbles because his brothers wouldn't let him use their precious golf balls. They all played the game. Indeed, all three were professionals, although Manuel, who was Seve's chief inspiration, was the only other one of them to make any sort of impression as a player – he won the Timex Open at Biarritz in 1983, where he consigned Nick Faldo to being runner-up.

In this haphazard fashion, Seve would play his own games in the neighbouring fields and on the beach, where the firm sand with its true surface would prove to be a marvellously ideal environment in which to cultivate one of the greatest putting strokes in history.

When he was eight, Manuel gave him a 3-iron. In general, his golfing education was looking up. He had just begun caddying at the local club, although the rules stipulated that caddies were not allowed to play the course. Since the club pro was Uncle Ramon, Seve knew he ought to play by the rules. Since he was Seve, he didn't. Around dawn or dusk, he'd be out there with his 3-iron, now hitting balls rather than stones. 'Everything I learned as a boy was from copying Manuel,' he said. 'I watched his swing and tried to imitate the things he was doing.'

He was hooked – probably hooking as well, but quite definitely hooked. The 3-iron is not an easy club to master, particularly for your first one. But Seve had no choice. From that genesis, having learned to play all his shots with a club that was only suitable for a few, he developed a short game that was never bettered. He would frequently skip school, understandably preferring to play golf rather than study books. His parents didn't realise that he was regularly leaving his club in drainage pipes on the course and swapping it for his school bag after lunch, when he was ostensibly on his way back to school. Dodging around the course like a culprit in his efforts to avoid coming across a legitimate member. Outing, he would play a few holes in this necessarily surreptitious manner.

All the while, his parents thought things were going fine at school, or at least they did until he got expelled. One day when he was 12, Seve was mortified to discover that one of his school books had inadvertently been ripped, possibly by his father. One thing was for sure: Seve knew it wasn't his fault. But the school was strict; it wasn't only the priests and soldiers who had to be obeyed. His teacher made him hold out his hand and she hit it with a whip. The boy was hurt and angry when he got home for lunch, no less so when he found that his parents weren't in. There was a bottle of wine on the table. He had some, then he had a bit more. By the time he got back to school, he was drunk. He saw the teacher, went up to her and began to hit her. They threw him out.

This transgression proved a great career move. His parents were by now coming round to the idea that, as with his brothers, golf was a big deal for Seve. With school now being out-of-bounds, they enrolled him for private lessons in the evenings. This may have been less fun than hanging around outside cafes trying to watch television but it did mean the daytime was free for playing golf when and where he could, and for caddying at the club. Close to perfect, in fact.

The Real Club de Golf de Pedrena was founded by the King of Spain and was opened in 1923. Seve's family had connections with it since before its inception. His maternal grandfather had sold a plot of land to the club for its project. The family link was maintained with Ramon Sota's retention as the professional. Seve assiduously went about his trespassing. He would wait until everyone had left and then practise for a couple of hours on the par-three 2nd hole, which is close to the road and out of view from the clubhouse, or else on the back nine, which is even more remote. This fox-like cunning was supplemented at home by using a can as a hole and practising his chipping with that as his target. And remember, all this was done with only a 3-iron, with which he had to hit the ball high and low, left and right, long and short, from short grass and from long grass.

His biggest frustration during these formative years was the gratuitously humiliating restriction imposed on the club caddies. Not only were they not allowed to play on the course, Seve was once banned from caddying for a week for making a practice swing. It was no surprise that this atmosphere bred a taste for rebellion. 'If they had two dozen balls in their bag, we would take one dozen and hit them,' said Seve. 'We would also step on balls in the rough and collect them later.' Since most members had a lot of money and were bad at golf, this provided a splendid opportunity to sell such balls on, very possibly to the member who'd recently 'lost' them. Alternatively, Seve would retrieve these balls at a suitable moment and later practise with them on the beach, or sneak on to the course at dead of night and play by the light of the moon.

There was one or two members whom Seve had reason to look upon kindly, who permitted the young caddie to play with them and their friends at weekends, despite the complaints from the club who tried to adamantly lay down the law that caddies could not play on the course – except for once a year, that is, in the caddies' championship.

There were three divisions in the Pedrena caddies' championship. The first time Seve played in the lowest, aged nine, with something approaching a full set of clubs, he finished fifth, shooting 51 for the

nine holes with a 10 on his card. He was runner-up the next year, won the second division with a 7 over 18 holes when aged 11, and went into the top division when he was 12. He didn't win that year but when he was 13 he won the 36-hole event with 65-71. Also aged 13, and more of a sign of what was to come, he beat Manuel – eight years his senior and a tour professional – for the first time over 18 holes.

Attitudes towards him at the club now altered in the wake of this convincing display of young talent. Instead of being rebuffed, he was accepted. He was allowed to practise on the course. And how he did it. He would hit hundreds of balls every day; the best part of four years spent doing little more than honing his game, refining that God-given ability. Almost the only life he knew was home and the golf course. Friendships were even less of a factor than they had been before. His route to adulthood through adolescence would mostly be a lonely one. But he didn't mind. This wasn't hard work. He was doing what he really wanted to do, doing what he loved. He was on the way to greatness – and he was sure of it.

Seve won the caddies' championship twice more before getting the chance to take his caddying skills to the other side of Spain. He had earlier caddied for Manuel in a tournament, but in late October 1972, Seve was among the caddies recruited from Royal Pedrena to travel to southeast Spain to caddie in the inaugural La Manga International Pro-Am.

La Manga was an ambitious new project – today it is one of the foremost sports complexes in Europe – and consequently it had no caddies of its own. For Seve, the long bus journey was worthwhile if only because it meant he encountered Gary Player, the first famous golfer he had met. *Manos de Plata*, they called him, 'Silver Hands', on account of his deft touch, notably from sand bunkers. Six years later, the two would play together in the final round at Augusta as the legendarily tenacious South African rallied from seven shots back to win the Masters. Also at La Manga that week, on the victorious team in the pro-am, no less, was a businessman by the name of Mark McCormack, the founder of the International Management Group (IMG), the world's leading sports entrepreneur. His path would cross Seve's many times in the future, although not in the way he would fervently wish – as Seve's manager.

It wasn't long before Seve's reputation began to go before him. Dudley Doust recalled Spanish professionals, not only Manuel, telling the British press in the summer of 1973 that there was an extraordinary talent in their midst. 'One day he will be better than all of us. You watch. You will see.' But within a few months of those accolades, Seve's formative plans for being a professional golfer had hit a snag largely of his own making.

It was a custom on New Year's Eve that the young folk of the village would set out for the evening with the intention of making mischief. It was unfortunate for Seve that the plans for 31 December 1973, involved Pedrena Golf Club. At that time, the club were trying to improve the drainage on the course and they had the necessary large tubes on site, awaiting work to begin after the holiday. The same sort of pipes that had provided sanctuary for his beloved first golf club were about to be hauled away. One of his friends had a bright idea. 'Let's push those tubes down this hill.' So they did, about 20 of them, and by the end of the evening they were scattered all over the 6th fairway. Seve insisted he didn't actually push any of the tubes – he was merely loitering with intent, you might say – but when it got out who the group of youths had been, Seve was the only one who had any relationship with the golf club. Inevitably, he was the one who had to pay the price. The imposition of a month-long ban from the club's property only affected him. As if that was not bad enough, he had been intending to turn professional in the January. Now he couldn't.

At this point, he got just what he didn't need – a helpful offer from a nephew, of a job working in

boatyard. His mother, disillusioned by the treatment of her boy by the golf club, thought this a good idea, since he was clearly going nowhere in his chosen sport. Fortunately, his father's view prevailed. 'He said I must start playing golf for a living, because I was good,' Seve recalled. He would sit out the ban, turn pro, and see what happened. Come the beginning of February, he returned to the club to his caddie and to practise, and then took the exams he required in order to turn professional, which he did on 22 March, 1974.

It is instructive to note that Seve did this without having had any amateur career to speak of. A few caddies' championships at Pedrena apart, he'd had no competitive experience. In America, that would have been unheard of – his counterpart (not that Seve has ever had a genuine equivalent) would surely have gone to university and played college golf. In Britain, players who would become Seve's peers, such as Nick Faldo, had auspicious amateur records. A little over 10 years later, another Spanish player, José María Olazábal, would complete the unprecedented feat of winning the British Boys', Youths' and Amateur Championships before turning professional.

Yet for Seve, there had been nothing other than those caddies' events, learning from Manuel and his own dedication, talent and self-belief. He had sacrificed the routine pleasures of the mid to late teens in order to devote everything to golf. Depending on how the mood took him, he could get almost maudlin about this – 'No one can understand how much I gave to my golf in those days and how much I lost regarding other things in life' – and he would suggest that if he could turn the clock back, he might have pursued his career at a slightly more leisurely pace. Of course, he couldn't have the time again and in any case it was always hard to believe that this rationalisation with hindsight was not coloured by the back problems he suffered from even before he got out of his teens.

Aged 14, he was in the boxing ring with a friend from the village. As Seve took a blow, the other boy trod on his foot. When Seve fell back, he landed hard on his spine. He was in pain for a few weeks and while the pain did ease with time, on other occasions it would feel stiff and awkward. It is likely, although not certain, that was the genesis of the injury that plagued him ever after. Carrying heavy bags and sundry other stuff around the farm wouldn't have helped either, and neither would the incessant working on his golf swing. Time went by and, as referred to in the Introduction, his severe practice regimen ahead of his first professional victory, in the 1974 Spanish Under-25's Championship at Pedrena, may have been the straw that...er, broke the camel's back.

His first tournament as a professional had been the Spanish National Professional Championship, Sant Cugat in Barcelona at the end of March 1974. He was accompanied on this – what would otherwise have been his first trip alone outside the Santander region – by his big brother, Baldomer. He finished 20th in the tournament, which was won by Manuel Pinero. Afterwards, he cried in the locker-room. Crazy as it sounds, he had expected to win. 'He was sobbing with his head on his knees,' said Pinero, who would later be a Ryder Cup teammate of Seve's. (In April 2012, Seve's son Javier would also make his tournament debut at Sant Cugat, in his case in a Peugeot Tour event. He didn't win either, but he did open with a 67.)

There followed a tournament at La Coruna, in Northern Spain, and then continental Open tournaments in Portugal, Spain and France. Seve missed the cut in them all except Portugal, his first tournament outside Spain, where, on his 17th birthday, he shot 89 in pre-qualifying and didn't make the field at all.

His return to La Manga for the Spanish Open wasn't so hot either. At dinner the night before the first round, another Spanish player owned up to having taken a 10 in a tournament at Royal Birkdale. 'Impossible!' declared Seve. 'Nobody can score double figures on one hole.' The next day he took an 11 at the par-five 9th and shot 83. A 78 the next day meant he had at last managed to break 80 in a tournament.

event and, amazingly, only left him a shot shy of making his first cut. With his prize-money earnings not threatening to hit three figures in pounds, and expenses well into the hundreds, it was a rather chastened 17-year-old who headed home for practice, practice and more practice.

Seve's next tournament was that Spanish Under-25s Championship at Pedrena; the one where, knowing every blade of grass, he had recorded his first win as a professional and collected a cheque worth £500. But in the aftermath of victory, he didn't feel great elation. He felt satisfied. He had never won a tournament before, but since – so his logic ran – he had turned professional in order to win golf tournaments, what he had just achieved was absolutely normal. As Pinero had also said in Barcelona: 'He always expects to win.'

He didn't win the Santander Open, the tournament following the Under-25s, but he did finish second. He also addressed the matter of money – i.e. his lack of it. Via an introduction from his brother Manuel, Seve met Dr Cesar Campuzano, a local man who had a radiology practice in Madrid. He agreed to underwrite Seve's expenses in return for 50 per cent of his winnings, and it was this financial arrangement that funded Seve's trip, with Manuel alongside, to South Africa at the end of the year. (His parents were evidently bullish about his prospects themselves, sold a cow to help their sons on their way.) Dr Campuzano's munificence was not to be stretched. From this point on, Seve started to win prize money, his earnings outstripping his costs, so he effectively became self-sufficient.

Through Uncle Ramon, meanwhile, Seve had been introduced to another wealthy local man, Emilio Botin, an eminent banker. In fact, Seve's father used to look after the Botin's house when the family were away from Santander and he would also caddy for Snr Botin occasionally. The Botin family used to spend a lot of time in Pedrena, especially in the summer, and Seve started giving golf lessons to the Botin children once his elder brother, Vicente, who originally undertook that function, had to leave in order to do his military service. Seve would do this both at the club and in a room at their house that was fitted out with a net. Among the six Botin children was the youngest daughter, Carmen, who took her first lessons under Seve's supervision. She would later become his wife. Carmen's father also offered to sponsor Seve, but the deal with Dr Campuzano was not only in place, the terms were more favourable to Seve.

In October 1974, Seve had put in a tremendous performance at the Italian Open. The autumn weather was stereotypically Venetian, with fog and mist playing around the Lido course. The first round had to be reduced to nine holes, but once the tournament had been completed after 63 holes, the fifth man home was, in the words of the *Mark McCormack Golf Annual* for that year, '17-year-old Spaniard Severiano Ballesteros, brother of Manuel and nephew of Ramon Sota'. The winner was Britain's Peter Oosterhuis, on the way to being the leading money-winner in Europe for the fourth year running. Johnny Miller, the 1973 US Open champion, was runner-up. What really impressed the 17-year-old prodigy-in-waiting was that he wasn't impressed at all. He had seen some of the best golfers in the world at first-hand and had seen nothing to fear. He felt what he had always known. He could beat anyone and everyone. There was no reason on earth why he could not be the best golfer on the planet.

The following week was the El Paraiso Open, on the Costa del Sol, where Roddy Carr, who would later become Seve's manager for a period, first came across Seve. Carr's father, Joe, was one of the great figures of amateur golf and the younger Carr was a former Walker Cup player himself, but by 1974 he was a struggling tour pro, paired with Seve.

'I'll never forget it,' he said. 'It was the second round and I had to make the cut to make my card [exempting him from having to pre-qualify for tournaments]. That's the most intensive negative pressure you could ever experience. I was drawn with this kid from Spain. We get on the first hole and

he hits a 5-iron into 20 feet and slams the club down on the ground. I thought it was a fairly decent shot. ~~He misses the putt and kicks the bag off the green. This went on the whole way round. I'm thinking, "Jesus Christ, does he expect to hole every shot?"~~ And it was getting to me. I was getting annoyed. He was passionate. If he didn't hit a 2-iron into 10 feet, he was pissed off. If he didn't hole every putt, he was pissed off. And he had a temper in those days. I battled my way through and made the cut but I went in and said to his brother, Manuel: "I'm not actually going to report him, though I should, but someone ought to explain to him that he is not going to hole every shot and that he has to be cool if or he'll be impossible to play with."

How Manuel dealt with that is not known. By the end of the tournament, he was probably feeling a bit pissed off himself. He had just lost a playoff to Oosterhuis. Seve had tied for 17th, five shots ahead of Carr. The impetuous behaviour Carr had witnessed that week was just one manifestation of Seve's intense, at times irrational, search for perfection in those early years. When he didn't attain it, which inevitably was often, he would sometimes deprive himself of dinner in the evening, a punishment for what he saw as his own stupidity.

1975 was a satisfying season for Seve. It wasn't great because he didn't win, which he thought he should, but he had top-10 finishes in the Spanish, Portuguese, Swiss and Madrid Opens and he was third, behind his hero Gary Player, at the Trophée Lancôme in Paris. His visits to the links of Britain (the links is a course built on sand-based land originally reclaimed from the sea; the type of course on which the Open Championship is always played), where he would enjoy three of the highest points of his career, were dismal affairs, however.

Seve hated Royal St George's, the links on the Kent coast and the venue for the PGA Championship in May. As far as he was concerned, it was as alien as playing golf on the moon. At St George's, you can't readily see the course from the clubhouse. Seve asked Manuel where it was. His brother pointed at the rugged linksland, amid which Seve could begin to recognise something resembling golf holes now that he looked carefully. 'It's there,' said Manuel. Seve explained this inhospitable experience to Dudley Doust by saying it was 'so cold, so much wind, so much different from any other course I had known'. He was handed three golf balls by the tour representative from Dunlop, who promised him three more if he made the cut. He looked out morosely at the five-foot rough and thought 'These will last me about six holes.' He shot 78-84. In the Open at Carnoustie in July, it was 79-80. Almost needless to say, he missed the cut there, too.

Come season's end, Seve was in America. This was partly at the behest of the man who had become his first manager, an American called Ed Barner, who looked after the business affairs of Johnny Miller, Billy Casper (a three-times major champion) and Roberto de Vincenzo, the Argentinian who had won the Open in 1967 and would later become a mentor of sorts for Seve, notably prior to his win in the 1979 Open at Royal Lytham. It was de Vincenzo who had alerted Barner to Seve's potential and it was Barner who encouraged Seve to try to earn his playing privileges on the US PGA Tour in the 108-hole qualifying school.

After five rounds, Seve was well placed to become the youngest-ever golfer to hold a PGA Tour card. After five and half rounds, he seemed a shoo-in. He had reached the turn in 33 and as long as he remained standing, he looked certain to qualify. The problem, however, wasn't physical. It was in his head. Thoughts of what this would mean – endless weeks of travelling, mostly alone, in a big country with a different language from the one he knew, away from his family and his village – swamped his brain. 'I was scared. I wasn't ready. I didn't want to be there.'

So he did something that is a necessarily rare thing for a great athlete to do, albeit Seve was not yet worthy of being called great. He gave up. Seve could hardly believe what he was doing but he did

anyway. He came home in 40 and was happy to have missed out on his card. Like greeting a
unfamiliar friend, he embraced failure.

Later in November, he paid his first visit to Japan, to play the Dunlop Phoenix tournament, and in
December he and Angel Gallardo represented Spain in the World Cup in Bangkok. Two 17th place
were the outcome as he closed out his promising season, a year in which he had consolidated on 197
and had established himself as something more than a footnote for those who followed professional
golf. In 1976, he would hit the big-time.

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