

CALIFORNIA BUILDER OF CHAMPIONS

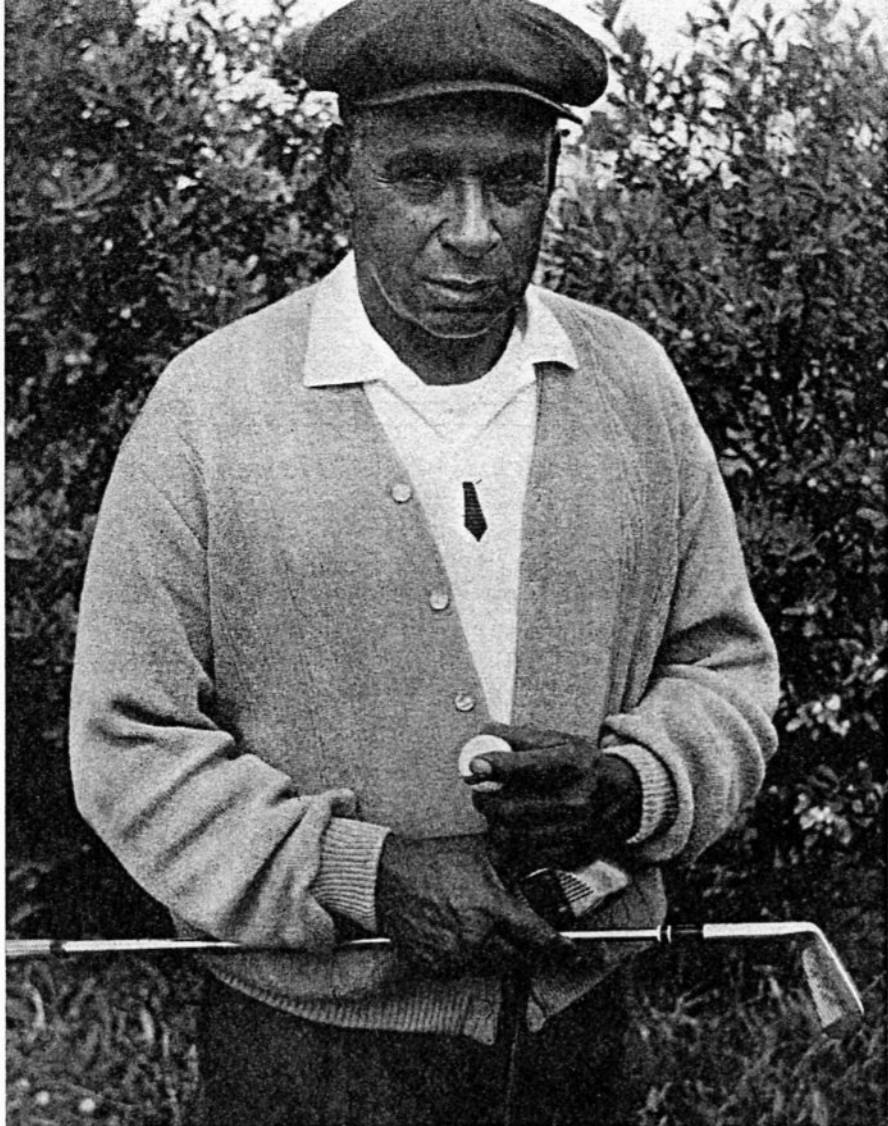
Lucius Bateman wanted to be a famous golfer, but when this dream faded he passed it on to others such as Tony Lema
by WALT ROESSING

THE SWINGS of many leading San Francisco Bay area golfers—Tony Lema included—bear certain similarities. These swings are compact, made with very firm wrists.

The source of this readily-identifiable and effective swing stereotype is Lucius Bateman, who became one of the nation's very best golf teachers after realizing 23 years ago that the game was not yet ready to accept Negroes as playing professionals. Today "Loosh," 57, is as respected, and almost as well-known, in California golf circles as are the many star players whom he helped.

Some 20 years ago, Bateman landed in California and began devoting all of his leisure time to teaching golf to a horde of eager and usually empty-pocketed youngsters around Alameda and Oakland. Either his teaching touch is truly magic or his material very good—probably some of both—for his students are annual contenders for the highest junior golf honors in the area. Some of his "graduates," such as Lema, have gone on to even greater links rewards.

One Sunday in 1962, about 100 of his army of present and former pupils held a banquet and tournament to honor Bateman's remarkable dedica-



Bateman (above) teaches his pupils good citizenship as well as sound golf principles. Below, he shows former pupil John Lotz, now a rookie on the professional tour, the battered old club, once used by John McMullin, also a successful former Bateman pupil. At right, he explains proper grip to a junior class.



tion to golf and the boys who play it. Leading his parade of followers were pro tour veterans Don Whitt and Johnny McMullin. Both are teaching golf today, and both had fair success on the circuit. Also among those attending were John and Dick Lotz, Hayward, Calif., brothers who are now on tour; Johnny Joseph, the 1963 National Public Links medalist and now a member of Houston University's formidable team; and Ross Randall and Dennis Plato, a pair of San Jose State collegiate hotshots. Commitments kept Lema away, but Champagne Tony wired his congratulations to Bateman.

It was fitting that these men gave Bateman a dinner, because over the years he has given a small personal fortune to his pupils. He has paid green fees, given away equipment and contributed literally thousands of hours of free lessons. Sometimes he even arranged jobs for his boys.

Bateman holds court at the Airways Fairways driving range in Oakland, on the shore of San Francisco Bay. He's been there since 1947, first as a handyman and now as head professional. That year, Lema first met Loosh and caddied for him in local tournaments.

"Tony was a scraggly little kid who loved golf," Bateman recalls. "At first I didn't think he was going to be a very good golfer. He didn't seem to have much talent, but he was—and is

—a fighter. I've seen some of the other kind, boys with all the talent in the world but without that competitive drive."

Bateman got Lema a job at the Airways Fairways and the two spent quite a bit of time on the practice tee. Tony's game came around quickly.

"I would take Tony to the toughest East Bay courses and we'd challenge anyone in a best-ball match," Bateman says. "Tony didn't look too strong with a golf club in his hands and we appeared to be pushovers. But he was impressive in those money matches. He would always come through in the clutch on key holes to help us win. Before every one of these matches I'd tell Tony to 'know what you've got, play up to it and when the chips are down, don't choke'. He seldom failed."

Bateman believes Lema gained much of his self-confidence in his game when he won the Oakland city championship at 18.

"After that tournament he told me he wanted to be a touring pro," Bateman relates. "Not many people believed he had the game to succeed, but look at him today."

Lema readily acknowledges Bateman's help. He still drops by occasionally to see his old instructor. The latest such visit was just before the 1964 Los Angeles Open.

Tony recognizes Bateman's other virtues as being even more important

than his considerable teaching ability. "Many kids might have made jails instead of pars and birdies if it hadn't been for Loosh," Lema says. "He knows kids—how they think, how to talk to them and what to do for them. As long as I've known him he's been willing to help kids for nothing in return."

When told of Tony's comment, Bateman scratched his head and shuffled his feet uneasily.

"If kids who don't have any money ask for my help," he explained, "I give them all I can. I just ask them for one thing in return: to try. I do the rest. I get to know them and they get to know me."

Bateman has a facility for reaching these boys. All who approach him know he is interested in them as individuals, whether or not they develop fine golf games. He takes time out to give fatherly advice on all subjects—school, money, girls, smoking, drinking and the future. Loosh doesn't smoke or drink himself ("I wouldn't want any of the younger tykes to get the wrong idea about me," he says).

"You know, there's something wonderful about spotting a kid with ability, then helping and encouraging him and seeing his progress," he adds. "It's great to see one of them win a tournament, but it's even nicer to watch them turn into good citizens."

Despite Lema's spectacular success,



Bateman considers McMullin his prize discovery.

In 1953, Bateman was trying to find a fifth man for the Alameda High School golf team. He spotted McMullin, then 16, thrashing the air wildly with an antiquated club that had a 16-penny nail driven through its head.

Rummaging through his battered office closet recently, Loosh pulled out this same club.

"McMullin couldn't break 100 when I saw him swinging this relic," he said. "I gave him a job at the Airways and gave him some help. In six months he was shooting par. Within a year he won the Northern California Junior Championship and was Alameda High's No. 1 player.

"He didn't just tell me what to do," Johnny says, "he demonstrated each move himself. And he taught me to love the game."

When Bateman first approached McMullin, Johnny was delighted. He knew about Loosh because of the instructor's success with another Alameda High School golfer and junior champion, Don Whitt.

Whitt and Bateman had a unique relationship early in Don's amateur career. The young man played well, but he wasn't certain of his ability to pick the right club for the shot. Consequently, he and Bateman worked out a system of baseball-type signals to be used while Don was competing.

Bateman remembers one junior event in which Ken Venturi and Whitt were entered. Venturi complained—rightly, Bateman admits—about the signals and instructed the tournament officials not to let Loosh near Don. Whitt didn't win this one, but it worked out better in a subsequent event.

"Don was one down and his ball was off the green in a bad lie late in this tournament," Bateman recounts. "The officials watched me to make certain I didn't give any signals. Don looked hard at me and I just looked up at the sky. Don got the message and used his wedge to loft the ball to within inches of the hole. His opponent three-putted, lost this hole and Don went on to win."

Bateman is convinced the Lotz brothers will surpass all his previous pupils on the tour.

"John has the best long-iron game I've seen," he says. "Dick might be even more successful because he's great with the putter."

Bateman, himself, has had many proud moments in his athletic career, which began in Biloxi, Miss. His family moved there shortly after his birth in Louisiana. While his mother worked in the fields, a white woman helped raise him, reading the Bible to him and instilling the idea of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. When he was old enough, he started caddying at the Edgewater Hotel and Golf Club near Biloxi.

There he met the first of several people who gave him a hand in life. Arthur T. Saunders, then the professional at Edgewater, was impressed with Bateman's attitude and selected the young man to help him during lessons.

"I earned a little extra money this way," Loosh recalls, "but more important I was able to listen to Mr. Saunders give lessons and I learned a lot about golf."

Bateman began his instructional career, in a way, at that moment. He passed along these playing tips to about 250 boys who caddied at one time or another at Edgewater.

His own game was not neglected, for he became an excellent player. Loosh once held the official Edgewater course record, a three-under-par 69. He eventually became the head caddie and as such enjoyed playing privileges at the course.

Golf was temporarily sidetracked when Bateman worked for a construction firm in Panama and then served a hitch in the Air Force. This took him to California, among other places, and Loosh took a liking to the area. After he was discharged from the Air Force in 1941 because of a back injury, he returned to Mississippi with the thought of polishing his game so that he might become a touring professional.

However, it was not easy in those days for a Negro to play professional golf. The Professional Golf Association's "non-Caucasian" clause has since been dropped, but it was in effect then.

Ambitious, Bateman moved to California and took a job in a San Francisco shipyard, still with his eye on a golf-playing career. While he was there he visited the old Alameda municipal course to recapture his swing and promptly attracted considerable attention. Loosh's first round was a 66! In one exceptional period of a few weeks, Bateman tied the Alameda course record with a 63, registered 66s

at Crystal Springs and San Mateo municipal courses, 67s at Tilden and Hayward, a 68 at Chabot and a 69 at San Jose's Hillview.

The pro at Alameda, the late Earl Fry, liked Bateman and asked Loosh if he would mind giving some of the many juniors hanging around the course some instruction. Fry himself had a heavy junior workload.

Bateman soon built an enthusiastic following as a teacher. After four-and-a-half years at the shipyard, he decided to return to golf on a full-time basis. Rig Ballard, owner of the Airways Fairways, recognized Loosh's talents and gave the gentle Negro a job at the driving range.

Later, after he became head pro at the range, Bateman received many offers of professional positions from good Bay Area clubs. Why hasn't he accepted any of these lucrative offers?

"I'm not a rolling stone," Bateman says. "Besides, Rig Ballard gave me a job here when none of the others were interested."

Bateman still enjoys a game of golf. All of the private clubs in the area have extended playing courtesies to him, and on Friday, his day off, he plays with some of his more advanced students.

Perhaps the lone sore spot in Bateman's career is that he has not been able to interest any sizeable number of Negro boys in golf.

"Colored boys don't think it's their sport," he explains. "When Joe Louis was heavyweight boxing champion all of the colored youngsters wanted to be fighters. It would be the same with golf if a Negro pro came up who could rival Arnold Palmer for headlines."

Nevertheless, Bateman is confident that one of these days a Negro boy will make links history. Possibly, only the fate of being born too early kept Loosh himself from fulfilling this role. But he is not bitter.

"My mother taught me that everything happens for the best," Bateman says. "What may seem like a tough break often works out the other way. I have no complaints."

Neither do the thousands of Bay Area golfers who have been helped by Bateman's teaching skills.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A public relations representative for a large California corporation, Walt Roessing is a frequent contributor to Golf Digest. His most recent story was a feature on rookie pro George Archer in the May, 1964, issue.