

**By Scott Ferrell**  
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Hal Sutton won 14 times on the PGA Tour, including the 1983 PGA Championship.

But to a new generation of fans, Sutton is remembered for staring down Tiger Woods at the 2000 Players Championship and winning by a shot.

"I'll never forget how the crowd responded," said Sutton, pointing in his Shreveport office to a framed photograph taken just after making the winning putt. "That's one of the moments I go back to."

Sutton, 51, has had many such moments in a career that includes peaks and valleys and eventual induction into the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame in Natchitoches on June 27.

Sutton burst onto the scene in 1980 as a collegiate golfer at Centenary College in his hometown of Shreveport. That same year, he won the U.S. Amateur Championship and was named the Golf College Player of the Year.

His college years hold fond memories for Sutton. He recalls his Centenary team going "from absolutely nothing to one of the best in the country when I was a junior and senior."

After college he flirted with retaining his amateur status, then joined the PGA Tour in 1982.

Success came to him immediately. He had three second-place finishes and a third-place finish before ending his rookie year with the first of his 14 PGA Tour wins — winning the Walt Disney World Classic.

One year later, at age 25, he won both the Players Championship and the PGA Championship.

After he won his first major by making a short putt to defeat Jack Nicklaus in the 1983 PGA and avoid a playoff, Nicklaus walked up to him, put his arm around Sutton and said, "That will be the first of many major championships for you, Hal."

Sutton finished atop the money list with \$426,668 in winnings. He was named the sport's player of the year by both the PGA of America and

the Golf Writers of America Association.

Life was good for Sutton, who was being called the “next Nicklaus.”

But even then, Sutton was fully aware of how fickle golf can be.

“Realistically,” he said following the 1983 season, “I know I’ll get to a point where I’m going to set goals that I’ll not be able to reach.”

Sutton had 11 top-10 finishes in 1984, and then won a pair of tournaments in both 1985 and 1986.

He had seven wins, including a major, in his first five full years on the PGA Tour.

Then everything changed.

Sutton went eight years — from 1986 until 1995 — without winning a tournament. His career reached bottom in 1992 when he made only eight cuts and had just one top-25 finish and a career-low in earnings at \$39,234.

“My swing was off considerably,” Sutton said. “I tried to make some changes but it didn’t work. I lost a lot of confidence during the course of it.”

He had gone from the “next Nicklaus” at age 25, to struggling with his game at 34.

His valley experience nearly cost him his pro career. He had to use a one-time exemption from being in the top-50 in career money to keep his PGA Tour card.

And, making matters worse, he didn’t feel the same way about golf anymore.

“I basically had gotten burned out on playing golf,” he said. “I’d done a lot of things that I really wanted to do up until 1987. I wanted to get away from golf.”

Slowly, though, Sutton began rebuilding his game.

His work with longtime friend Jackie Burke, the 1956 Masters’ champion, resulted in Sutton listening less to outside experts. His work

with former Centenary College coach Floyd Horgen helped him get his swing back.

The results came in 1998 when he posted wins in the Texas Open and again in the Tour Championship. To win the Tour Championship, he defeated Vijay Singh on the first playoff hole.

After winning just once between 1987 and 1997, Sutton had his best year on tour since 1983.

The rejuvenation of Sutton's career continued in 1999 as he won \$2.1 million, made 22 of 25 cuts, had 13 top-10 finishes and added another victory.

His year, though, was highlighted by his play on the United States Ryder Cup team. He was 3-1-1 on the American team that won the Ryder Cup in Brookline, Mass.

"People will never know what a job Hal did that week," 1999 Ryder Cup captain Ben Crenshaw said. "He was our backbone — apart from the golf that he played, which was incredible.

"But the things he said to the team were so forceful, so authoritative and meaningful, it pulled everybody up. I'll remember those days the rest of my life."

Sutton was in the middle of a career revival. He made more than \$1 million each year from 1998 through 2001. In that four-year span, he won six of his 14 total victories.

He made his fourth Ryder Cup team as a player in 2002 — going 1-1 in the matches — and was chosen as the team captain for the United States for 2004.

"It's one of the great honors that any golfer could ever have bestowed on him, to be able to lead a team in the United States in international competition like the Ryder Cup," Sutton said.

The high of being a Ryder Cup captain was soon followed by a low.

His American team was beaten badly — 18 1/2 to 9 1/2. And Sutton was ripped by media outlets, particularly for his pairing of Woods and Phil Mickelson.

"The Ryder Cup took as much out of me as anything I've ever done," Sutton said. "It's taught me the last stage of life —when you take a hold of things and you don't have any control over it and you're dependent on others.

"It caused me to want to get away and do something else. That's a sad time really. I look back and I'm disappointed in some of the things I did. I'm disappointed with the way they turned out. I'm disappointed in everything really. It wasn't good for anybody."

Sutton seemingly withdrew from the game after the Ryder Cup experience.

But he didn't withdraw from the public scene.

In 2006, he shared the Golf Writers Association of America's Charlie Bartlett Award with fellow state pro golfers Kelly Gibson and David Toms after combining to raise more than \$2 million in aid to victims of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita.

That same year, Sutton saw another dream become a reality.

He had dreamed of a children's hospital in Shreveport following the death of agent Gilbert Little's 7-year-old daughter, Reagan, from spinal meningitis in the summer of 2001.

In May of 2006, Christus Schumpert Sutton's Children's Medical Center opened in Shreveport.

Sutton's work both with the hospital and with hurricane victims helped him receive the 2007 Payne Stewart Award for reflecting Stewart's respect for the traditions of the game, his commitment to uphold the game's heritage of charitable support and his professional and meticulous presentation of himself and the sport through his dress and conduct.

"There's more important stuff in life than chasing the white ball and chasing your own personal dream," Sutton said upon his acceptance. "It's balance. And not balance in the golf swing."

That balance showed itself away from the course. Besides his work with his foundation and the children's hospital, he spearheaded the design and growth of Boot Ranch, a golf resort and residential development, in the Texas hill country near San Antonio. He also spent

more time with his family.

His golf game, though, was put on hold, playing just an occasional Champions Tour event last year.

That changed with just a simple question from a child.

As he watched Tiger Woods' stirring U.S. Open win on television, his son Holt, then 5, looked up and said, 'You beat him, didn't you, Daddy?'