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Legends of Sport: Mildred "Babe" Didrikson Zaharias

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Mildred "Babe" Didrikson Zaharias



Accolades

Basketball

- All City and All-State in high school
- Played for a sponsored team in her last semester of high school, Employers Casualty, and outscored the opposing team in her first game. Her team competed in national tournaments

Olympics

- 1932 Won the U.S. Women's Track and Field Championships as the lone member of the Employer's Casualty team. She placed in 7 of the 8 events, winning 5 and tying for first in a another. She scored 30 points herself while second place Illinois Women's Athletic Club scored 22 points.
- 1932 Olympics won the gold medal for hurdles and javelin while taking silver in the high jump. She set Olympic and world records in each event she competed. She's the only female Olympian to win individual medals in running, jumping, and throwing.

Golf

- Babe won 14 golf tournaments in a row at one point. The longest streak in golf history.
- She was the first women to play in a PGA event.
- One of the founders of the LPGA.
- Won her last major golf tournament while dying of terminal cancer.



Early Life

Mildred "Babe" Didrikson Zaharias was born in Port Arthur, Texas in 1914. Her parents were immigrants from Norway. She was the sixth born child out of seven. Her father was a carpenter and her mother was an amateur athlete, known to be the finest woman ice skater and skier in her part of Norway, who was also a practical nurse.

Cultural Significance

Babe lived in a time that was difficult for women in sports. She struggled finding competitions to play in during the first part of her career in golf, since she lost her amateur status. Never getting an answer as to why she was ineligible, she carried on. There were only two tournaments per year that were worth playing to her as a pro. In order to gain back her amateur status she was required to take a three-year waiting period, which she did. She went on to win her first tournament as an amateur and followed that up with a 14-tournament win streak which is the top mark still in all of golf. Eventually, she became a big part of the beginning of professional golf for women by helping found the LPGA. Sports and competition was her life. She is one of the most competitive athletes to have ever lived, if not the most competitive. Babe won her final golf tournament she played, while dying of terminal cancer. She passed away in 1956.

Resources

- Andrews, E. (2016, June 24). 10 Things You May Not Know About Babe Didrikson Zaharias. Retrieved from <https://www.history.com/news/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-babe-didrikson-zaharias>
- Conway, J. (1992). Written by herself : An anthology (1st ed.). New York: Vintage Books.