

History of First 49 Tournaments

On August 24, 1909, twenty-five women met at the Algoma Country Club, in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, for a “golf rally” which was to be the most significant single event in the history of Wisconsin women’s golf. Five clubs were represented. A committee of two---Miss Alice Orwell of Blue Mound Country Club, and Mrs. E. R. Whitcomb of Kenosha---were in charge of arrangements. The first day, the contestants played a practice round, and then became veranda golfers for bridge whist. The next day, they played nine holes, qualifying in the morning, with the first round matches in the afternoon. The last day they played the second round matches and the finals. Mrs. George Niedecken was the winner of the “championship” flight and became the first Wisconsin State Champion. Sandwiched somewhere between matches, a meeting was held with the help of the Western Association, and the Wisconsin Women’s Golf Association was born, with Miss Alice Orwell as its first president.

Thus was created our Association, and its first tournament was held. They could not foresee, surely that 49 tournaments and 53 years later, it would have grown into the large, smoothly run organization of today.

The following year, Mrs. E. R. Whitcomb won at Sheboygan, and repeated in 1911, 1912, and 1916, to become the first four-time champion. She was given possession of the original trophy donated by the Algoma Country Club. The present trophy was purchased by the Association, as a traveling one, in 1917.

From modest beginnings, the W.W.G.A. had 16 clubs represented by 1920. Pausing only briefly for World War I, 1926 saw 25 clubs as members; and in 1929, at Maple Bluff in Madison, there were 130 contestants, 65 of whom were playing in their first tournament. The depression jolted tournaments to a halt for a year, and the membership dropped off sharply. However, it came back strongly until World War II, when for two years we thought of War bonds instead of golf balls. After the war, recovery was slow, and only 7 clubs were represented at the first meeting. It gathered momentum rapidly until two unwieldy tournaments of over 200 entries in 1949 and 1953 forced limitation of the number of entries to around 160, to keep it manageable. This was accomplished by lowering the handicap for eligibility and limiting the number of flights. We now have 61 clubs as members of the Association, many efficient committees from the host club, and an executive board that functions twelve months a year.

Qualifying has been subject to numerous changes. Early in its history, contestants qualified by setting handicap limits in each flight of eight; if you failed to play a score that placed you in your handicap flight, you did not qualify. Non-qualifiers then played a 36-hole handicap event, and prizes were given for winner and runner-up. As the tournaments grew, so many became non-qualifiers that they threatened to outnumber the qualifiers. The committee first changed to flights of 16, and then to straight qualifying. This method was used until 1959, with two years of experimenting with other methods---one in 1948, when an entrant could drop only 16 places

below her handicap position; and the second in 1958, when 32 qualifiers were placed in the championship flight. Both times the complaints were loud, long and numerous, and they were dropped immediately. The matter of qualifying has been a source of argument from the first day, but the adoption in 1959 of the present method of USGA projected score has apparently calmed the troubled waters. Since each club must now have a course rating to send entries and must use the standard handicapping method, this last qualifying method seems established as a permanent procedure.

The social side of the tournaments has had an interesting history. From the bridge whist on the veranda in 1909, it reached a peak in 1934, with a dinner dance and a dinner bridge arranged for the contestants. After World War II, however, the social side at the first post-World War II tournament was reduced to "4:30 to 5:30 P.M. revelry on the lawn." Now the only sponsored social activities are the traditional Dutch teat cocktail party and coketail-splash party for Juniors.

There have been other changes over the years. The entrants in 1909 wore long, full dresses. Off the course they often wore flowered hats and high-buttoned shoes. Many of the golfers of today wondered how they managed to putt with the long, blowing skirts. The answer---some wore the putting belt or strap, which consisted of a length of $\frac{1}{2}$ " or $\frac{3}{4}$ " width of white elastic worn around the waist until ready to putt, when it was lowered to below the knees---and there you were, no blowing skirt to interfere. Skirts gradually crept up as the years passed, but the first break-through came 26 year later, in 1935, when two contestants wore culottes. This was considered so revolutionary that it was noted in the papers. The first pictures of shorts in tournament play appeared in 1942, and then on only 6 of the 16 junior entrants. The sleeveless blouse and Bermuda shorts are now nearly the uniform of the "gal"fer, except for the older holdouts. The year 1961 saw the introduction of the Bermuda length culottes, and some of the old skirted guard succumbed to the lure of comfort and wore them.

Another difference from the early days is the type of accommodations for out-of-town players. The average player now seeks an air-conditioned motel, shower, swimming pool, television, available ice cubes and mixes, and a convenient breakfast bar.

Mrs. Konrad Testwuide of "Pine Hills", Sheboygan tells of the early days when she and her pals made the tournament circuit. One year when the meet was at the Kenosha club they were housed at the old Racine College, then a boys' school. There were no screens on the windows and no locks on the doors. Afraid of prowlers, they piled the furniture before the door. Then, to be certain they would hear the resulting crash, they balanced crockery that was necessary equipment in some bedrooms of those days on top of the pile. When they woke the next morning the door was intact, but a squirrel, who had come in the unscreened window, sat on the footboard of their bed. They did not record their reactions.

The weather during the tournaments has always been a source of apprehension. It actually became a source of serious study in 1948, with a report made to the annual meeting. After a

study of trends, and a discussion, the dates of the tournament were left unchanged. Over the years there have been sunny days and rainy days, hot days and cool days, but on three occasions the storms were noteworthy. In 1922, at Tuscumbia Country Club, when the contestants awoke one morning, a cyclone had taken the roof off of the hotel, broken windows, filled the grand piano with water, and ripped the porch off of the clubhouse---but the tournament went on! In 1941, at Kenosha, a storm of such violence raged in the middle of one round that play was discontinued that day. All returned at 7 o'clock the following morning to finish the unplayed holes, and then continue on that day's round. In 1950, at Merrill Hills, the rains were so heavy that for the only time in the history of the tournaments, play was postponed for the entire day.

There have been two holes-in-one made in tournament play. Mrs. Bernie Franck of Blue Mound Country Club made an ace in 1940 at Milwaukee Country Club, and in 1961, Mrs. Barbara Herrick of Nakoma Country Club holed her tee shot on No. 16 at "Pine Hills", Sheboygan.

The score range of the championship flights has narrowed and lowered some from the early days, though some of the early star golfers could have held their own with the present groups. Range in 1934 was 84-98, 76-90 in 1937, 81-94 in 1941, 77-85 in 1959, but the medalist scores of 74 by Marilyn Klumb (Mrs. Jack Williams) in 1953 at Blue Mound Country Club and Carol Sorenson in 1961 at "Pines Hills", Sheboygan are the lowest ever played during a tournament proper.

The junior flights have had a stormy career. The first one was in 1926; because of lack of interest, they were discontinued in 1936; and later revived in 1938. Now, a special committee sees to the entertainment of these future stars. In 1961, 30 juniors entered and the flights seem well established. Four junior champions have gone on to be State champions. Goldie Bateson was junior champion in 1928, and champion in 1936-1937. Marion Callahan Kirschner was junior champion in 1931, and champion for the first time in 1934. Merle Nickles was junior champion in 1929 and 1930, and won the State championship in 1932. Finally, Carol Sorensen held the junior crown in 1956 and 1958, and became one of our youngest State champions in 1959.

The idea of a senior flight (over age 50) was first mentioned in 1947, but the reluctance of players to enter put it off until the first flight was played in 1958, with 14 entries, whose handicaps ranged from 8 to 32. The variation in the abilities of players made the flight unattractive as a scratch event, and, for lack of response, was killed in 1959. In 1960 and 1961 it was made a handicap event, and the size of the entry list assures it a continuing place on the program. Mrs. Clara Faulk, a remarkable "over 65" golfer who regularly plays in the nineties, is the current senior champion.

There have been other outstanding senior golfers. Grandma Young of LaCrosse is remembered as a 70 year old who managed ten lumber yards, and played in the tournament at

LaCrosse Country Club in 1913. Mrs. Lillian Iserman of Kenosha, at “over 65” played at the Kenosha Country Club in 1931.

There have been young players, but the two youngest have been entered in the mater-filia event. Mary Luedtke, at 7 years 5 months of age, played with her mother in 1951, at the Kenosha Country Club; and Kathy Kirschner, at 7 years, 8 months of age, played with her mother, a former champion, in 1961, at “Pine Hills”, Sheboygan.

The Mater-Filia Trophy was donated in 1924 by Frances Hadfield and her mother. Mrs. Hadfield was one of the original 25, and an early president. She was exceptionally active in promoting the tournaments.

The Blue Mound Trophy was presented by the men of Blue Mound Country Club in 1915. It was formerly played as match play against bogey without handicaps by teams of four from each club. In 1961 this was changed to match play against par with handicaps. It is played for on qualifying day.

The Milwaukee Journal Trophy was given by the Milwaukee Journal in 1926, and is won by the lowest total of the scores on qualifying day of the four low handicaps players from each club.

These many years have seen many of our 21 champions go on to triumphs in the Women’s Western and National tournaments. Mrs. E. R. Whitcomb, our first four-time winner, was content to stay at home. But Frances Hadfield, probably the most colorful golfing figure the State has produced, went far. She entered the State in 1913, with red braids flying, and a long sweeping swing. She won the first of her four State titles in 1917. For 13 years she was a champion, runner-up, semi-finalist, or medalist. She went on to win the Women’s Western Crown and many sectionals titles. She qualified many times for the National Amateur. She continued to compete until 1932, and then came back in 1937, only to lose in the finals---in 38 holes---to Goldie Bateson.

The next four-time winner of the State title, Bernice Wall (1921, 1923, 1924 and 1925) went on to play and win in many National tournaments.

Dorothy Page, a three-time winner (1927, 1930 and 1931) won the Women’s Western in 1926, at the age of 17, and was runner-up in 1930. She won the championship of her home club Maple Bluff, Madison, at 14 years of age.

As a junior, Goldie Bateson won the Women’s Western Junior, and then won the State title in 1936-37. She has turned pro and is now the professional at the Robert’s course, Milwaukee.

Mrs. Russel Mann, who moved into Wisconsin in time to win the State title in 1938-39 (as Lucille Robinson) won the Women’s Western championship in 1933 and again in 1941, after leaving the State. She was a runner-up in 1932 and 1942.

Our winningest champion is Paula Clauder. She has worn the State crown six times---1942, 1948, 1949, 1951, 1953 and 1956. She has won the Metropolitan eight times, and won the consolation of the Western Amateur championship in 1958.

Mary McMillan Fossum who was champion at 17 in 1945, again won in 1946 and 1947, and made national headlines in 1946 by defeating the all-time great Babe Zaharias in the semi-finals of the Women's Western Open. She lost to well-known Louise Suggs in the finals.

Holly Roth, junior champion in 1953, was runner-up that year in the National Junior Championship.

Our former touring pro, Joyce Ziske, was State champion in 1952, 1954 and 1955; then she turned professional. That year, with Wiffi Smith, she won the 10th Annual Women's International Four Ball Tournament. She won the Syracuse Open in 1956, her first as a pro. In 1960, Joyce won the Women's Western Open title with a 293. That year she was fourth highest in earnings, \$12,279.86. In 1961 she became Mrs. Thomas R. Malinson and left the circuit for what appears to be a permanent retirement from the professional ranks.

Carol Sorensen, one of our youngest champions, won the State in 1959, at the age of 16, and repeated in 1960, and went on to win the National Junior crown. In 1961 she was medalist in the Women's Western Amateur, qualified for the U. S. Amateur, and won the Metropolitan.

Another of our former champions, Marion Callahan Kirschner (1934 and 1950) announced after playing in the Mater-Filia of 1961 that she was turning pro at the Lake Windsor Country Club, near Madison.

Though, rightfully, the spotlight is on the champions, we cannot close without mentioning the hundreds of "gal"fers, who, year after year, enter the tournament, happy if they get as high as 1st or 2nd flight, but more often are in 3rd, 4th, or lower. Some have played in ten, some in fifteen, and a few in over twenty tournaments. What makes them come back year after year, I do not know. If I could put my reasons into words I would broadcast them to all the average golfers in the State. All I can say is that tournaments are fun---and the 50th will be the best of all. Good luck in the next 50 tournaments!

**Jeannette Goodale
(1962)**

Note: Jeannette is a 22 year "timer" herself now residing at Boynton Beach, Florida.