

## "Babe" (Mildred Ella Didriksen) Zaharias

<http://www.worldgolfhalloffame.org/babe-zaharias/>



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One of seven children of Norwegian immigrants, Babe Didrikson Zaharias is often considered the greatest female athlete of all-time, and is often in the discussion of the greatest female golfer ever. Babe played almost every sport but became famous to the American sporting public with her feats in track & field in 1932. Her track career was brief but brilliant and her performance at the 1932 AAU meet remains among the greatest in sporting history. In the space of 2½ hours she competed in eight events, winning four of them outright and finishing equal first in another. As the only representative of her club, Employers Casualty AA of Dallas, she won the national team championship with the powerful Illinois Women's AC, who fielded more than 20 athletes, in second place. At the end of the day the score was Didrikson - 30 points, Illinois - 22 points. At the 1932 Olympics, Babe opened her Olympic campaign by winning the javelin on her first throw with a new Olympic record, she then equalled the world record (11.8) in the heats of the 80 meter hurdles and the following day brought the record down to 11.7 as she took her second gold medal. Finally she placed second in the high jump after a controversial jump-off with Jean Shiley. The judges ruled that Didrikson had dived over the bar although she had been using the same style throughout the competition. Prior to the Games the Babe had already been voted an all-American in basketball for three years and, as a 17-year-old, she twice broke the world javelin record in 1930. Babe forfeited her amateur status after the Olympics by allowing her name to be used in an automobile advertisement, so she then turned her attention to golf and was easily the greatest woman golfer of her era.

In 1934 Babe won the first tournament she entered and, until cancer ended her career in 1955, she won multiple major titles, including the 1946 US Women's Amateur and the 1947 British Ladies' Amateur (the first American to ever win both of those championships). She also played in three men's PGA Tour events in 1945, making all three cuts at the Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Tucson Opens. From 1948 to 1951, she was the leading money winner on the LPGA circuit, during the first four years of its existence, and she won 41 LPGA sanctioned events in her career. This included 10 major professional titles, the US Open in 1948, 1950, and 1954, the Western Open in 1940, 1944-45, and 1950, and the Titleholders in 1947, 1950, and 1952. Better known professionally under her married name of Babe Zaharias, she contracted colon cancer in 1953 but recovered from major surgery to win the 1954 US Open, and two tournaments in 1955, before dying from cancer at the age of 44.

Babe was considered the most popular golfer of her day, male or female, and it has been said her popularity in golf is rivaled only by Arnold Palmer's. Her awards are almost too numerous to mention. In 1950 she was voted the Greatest Female Athlete of the First Half of the Century, and she was voted Female Athlete of the Year by the Associated Press six times. In 1999 the Associated Press voted her as Woman Athlete of the 20th Century, while *Sports Illustrated* placed her second behind the heptathlete [Jackie Joyner-Kersey]. She is a member of the LPGA Hall of Fame and the World Golf Hall of Fame (1951). In 1957 she was posthumously given the Bob Jones Award by the US Golf Association, in recognition of distinguished sportsmanship in golf.

To auction, buy, consign or sell Babe Zaharias memorabilia or golf memorabilia, please contact [Nate@NateDSanders.com](mailto:Nate@NateDSanders.com).