

Glenna Collett commentary on the Women's Golf Circuit in 1931

WHO are these girls known as golf champions throughout the world, and what do they do besides swing a golf club and chase an elusive little white ball over the fairways?

I will tell you one surprising thing at the start: We are leaders of double lives, and we are only half of what we seem or of what the press would make us seem. To most of the world we are mere automatons, marching up and down the greenswards of the land where we compete, hammering, hammering away

At golf balls, heads up as we walk, heads down as we swing, forever hitting, swinging, and in the end—what ?

But to ourselves that is only half of what we are—half of what we think and do; of what we give our energies to, and hope to be. The other part varies among us, according to our tastes, our opportunities, and our environments.

What are our other halves?

First, because she is the greatest of us all, I see in my mind's eye Joyce Wethered, that shy, slender, wistful English contestant, winner of three Ladies' British Open Golf Championships and any number of lesser events. I recall a day in 1920 at St. Andrews, in Scotland, when Joyce and I were fighting for the open championship, in the finals.

A gallery of six thousand or more enthusiastic Scotsmen trailed after us. They raced down the fairways like antelopes, and surged around the greens in droves. They watched Joyce as if she were a goddess on whom depended everything the Scotsman covets—golf crowns. They have always loved her with open adoration, and they have followed her, I suppose, as no other girl has ever been followed around golf courses.

While she is playing they never move nor make a sound—true Scotsmen that they are—but after a tournament they go wild if she wins. On this particular day she did win, and one would have thought some decisive victory in history had taken place instead of six thousand people rejoicing over one slender girl's golf achievement.

On the decisive green she was fairly deluged with hand-shakes and words of approval—so much so that after half an hour a bodyguard of police had to come to our rescue, and, breaking up the onslaught, escort us by motor back to the clubhouse.

ON THE way Joyce seemed terrifically tired under the strain, and before she could take part in the cup presentations she had to sneak away to sit quietly alone for a few moments in order to regain some peace of mind. Then, when she finally accepted her trophy, I noticed she was almost overcome with the excitement and strain of the day.

And she really was. That day marked the end, for the time being at least, of her tournament golf entries. From then on she chose the other side of her existence and remained there. Just what is this existence? For one thing, she lives with her family in a lovely country house just out from London. She lives quietly, with the simplest pleasures for her amusements. Although she is in her late twenties one may find her any day romping in the garden with her dogs or engrossed in her library with her books.

As a child she was always delicate, so that governesses were her teachers, and not the public-school masters. She has been known as an excellent student and a fine linguist. Her family are a passion with her. Together they enter with keenness into all sports, and excel in some branch of these sports. Her brother, Roger, a great golfer, in fact runner-up to Bobby Jones in the open championship in England last year, is her idol. She minds no defeat for herself, but when Roger is beaten she is in despair.

Sometimes she travels on the Continent, but it is said of her that she never feels contented anywhere but at home; that after any golf match in the past, no matter what the triumph—and there were triumphs, constant triumphs—off she went, away from her hero worshipers, quietly, in the most unobtrusive way, to her own secluded home existence.

Sometimes, shortly after those international struggles, when contestants from the world over had come to measure their skill against hers, one could find her sitting serenely beside a placid English stream, fishing. This was her means of let-down—her way of turning her back on galleried glory. Besides, there is nothing a Wethered enjoys more than fishing, unless it might be golfing or, on a pinch, tennis.

Many people have wondered why tennis, in its championship form, did not interest Joyce, for she plays it with the same uncanny ease of coordination and timing that she does golf. But there you have it—that double life again. The capacity for greatness in every sport, but the temperament to turn from the spotlight; to pursue life among green pastures away from thundering throngs and the dust of combats.

If this temperament continues to control Joyce's life, one of the most superb golfers of her day will have been lost to a worshipping public. A great pity, and one that every woman golfer to-day deploras, for a women's golfing championship without her is like a men's championship without Bobby Jones. Until you have beaten Joyce Wethered there is no assurance in your heart that you are on the crest of the golf wave. With her skill blocked you can rest secure for a while, and turn contentedly to that other half of yourself, waiting patiently for you.

TURNING from England to America, let us get a close-up of Maureen Orcutt, one of our country's great women golfers. Who is she? "Maureen Orcutt Captures Metropolitan," "Maureen Orcutt Triumphs at Pinehurst," "Maureen Orcutt Wins Her Team Match in England." Strangely enough, she it is who makes those headlines for the very journals in which they appear.

Not only does she hammer a golf ball magnificently throughout a week of tournament play, but, after each day of play she still has the energy to dash away for a half hour with a typewriter—a half hour in which she records not only her own play, but those of all the other contestants during that tournament. When she is finished she is off to the nearest telegraph office to relay her story to a New York newspaper for their next morning's consumption. And they do consume it.

Whenever women's golf tournaments are taking place the newspaper gets its information direct from Maureen Orcutt. In England last year, during our women's team play, it was a miracle to see Maureen's reactions: First, her quick acclimatization in a perfectly strange land; next, her beautiful golf before thousands of curious eyes, and then the handling of her work. Each day dashing off after play to struggle with typewriters and cables in order that she might keep the home fires of her job in New York burning until her return.

She neglects neither her golf nor her writing. Each one seems to weigh equally in her scale of existence. Even when she was a high-school pupil in Englewood, N. J., she had a similar division of activity. As a spectacular basket-ball player she captained her team for two years. As a newspaper contributor she did a weekly column of school happenings of Englewood for the Bergen Evening Record.

Her home life is passed in the country just out from New York, with her father, mother, and twin brothers, all enthusiastic followers of sport, and all worshipers of their talented Maureen. With them she golfs and goes to club dances. For them she cooks breakfast and runs the family errands. All told, she herself will say that life is entirely fine. Not such an automaton, Maureen Orcutt.

THEN there is the youngest champion of us all, nineteen-year-old Helen Hicks, of Hewlett, Long Island. Debonair, blithe, happy-go-lucky, and fearless, she enters into everything she undertakes with the same splendid, joyous spirit. And she undertakes many things. Besides her golf there are tennis, swimming, riding, and flying. These she does well and often, depending upon circumstances.

When sports are not in order, one finds her several days a week in New York, sometimes sailing into magazine editorial departments, where she receives assignments for articles, which she herself writes breezily and entertainingly; or she goes off to Central Park to make a speech to the Girl Scouts of America concerning good sportsmanship; or she has lunch with distinguished visitors from abroad, people who met her during her tournament play last spring and who were charmed by her naive personality.

But despite these attentions Helen Hicks is at heart a simple girl, who adores her family, and who puts that family first. After any golf tournament, no matter what the outcome, her one thought is to get home as quickly as possible. For at home is a large after-tournament chocolate cake waiting to be eaten, baked especially for her by her mother, and a group of proud older brothers and sisters waiting anxiously to ask questions.

But, as she laughingly says, this ovation does not last long; the cake is soon consumed; the family dub her "kid" again, and once more she is errand "boy." However, this role she enjoys, for she plays it in several ways. If they send her for yeast, she may go by aeroplane for it; or if the post office is her objective, she may jog over on horseback; and when her married sister wants to park the baby with Grandma Hicks for the day, Helen plays nursemaid in her low racing car, with baby as a passenger. Whatever she does, she does good-naturedly, for, in her own words, "Everything's jake; so why not?"

As a contrast, there is the beautiful and dignified French golfer Simone Thiome de la Chaume, not only France's greatest woman golfer but now the wife of Rene Lacoste, the celebrated French tennis player, whom America has admired without stint at his appearances here.

It was during one of these voyages in 1927, strange to relate, that these two countrymen met and fell in love. Rene was here to represent France on the tennis courts, Simone to uphold her country's honor in golf. Although at the time sports were absorbing them both, something else was of even greater importance—the knowledge that on their return to France one family would eventually contain two champions. Last year, at a brilliant wedding, this knowledge became a fact when the two champions were united.

Though only twenty-three, Simone has the poise of a much older girl, yet the actual experience of a much younger one. Her poise comes from a fine inheritance and a careful education, gained both in England and on the Continent. Her lack of experience arises from a carefully chaperoned youth, the custom for aristocratic young France. Music, dancing, languages—all these she pursued to the very year of her marriage.

I remember only a short while ago, when Simone had already to her credit a Ladies' British Open Championship and several French golf titles, we were motoring together in Paris, and, reaching her destination, as she alighted Simone confided to me that she was on her way to dancing school—a ballroom dancing school, such as most American girls have abandoned long before they reach sixteen.

As to her command of languages, Simone puts us Americans to shame. She speaks several fluently, and English perfectly. In fact, she enjoys English so much that her two English Scotties, which she brought as babes from Devon, have never been addressed in any other language but their native tongue. And as with the dogs, during tournament play with her she speaks always with you in your own language, so that one may heave a great sigh of relief in having escaped revealing one's own weak French.

Having much of the quiet dignity of Simone, yet far greater shyness, there is our own young Virginia Van Wie from Chicago. It was about six years ago, as a girl of sixteen, that she was first

seen in tournament action. Rather lanky, boyish, shy to the wilting point, she, with her ardent followers, little schoolgirls with pigtailed down their backs, surprised the golfing world by her brilliant playing.

She surprised it still more when it was learned that at first golf was compulsory with her, a doctor having advised it for her delicate health, and that it was not until sometime later that she really became devoted to it. Then, since the sport rewarded her with good health. she became its grateful slave, following it passionately wherever it chose to lead her, and following it daily, except Sundays, when nothing can induce her to play golf.

Of us Americans, I believe she is the most conscientious player, and the most retiring. Although she and I have waged many a battle, have stayed constantly at the same hotels and clubs for years, and have traveled on the same boat to England and in the same railway trains both here and abroad, yet her reticence is as great as it was the first day I met her.

In England last year, after a match, when some autograph collectors were asking for my signature, I noticed Virginia hanging around. Then she was gone without apparently accomplishing anything or saying a word. Later I found that she too was an autograph collector, but too bashful to ask me, her six-year golfing companion, for my signature.

With this incident in mind, imagine the effect a large, hurrying golf gallery must have on her in tournament play! Fortunately, when it is all over, she can creep away unobtrusively to her conservative family, either in their winter home in Florida or their summer place in Michigan.

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With us all, so far, the note of strong family protection has run through the story: Joyce, with her beloved Wethereds watching over her as if she were a child; Maureen, with the eager backing of her husky brothers and sport-loving parents; Helen, with her chocolate cake made by devoted hands; Simone, with her French protective traditions; and Virginia, with the stanch background of a high-principled home life. Whatever these girls essay, a large amount of family fortune interweaves itself into the texture of the doing.

But now we come to one of us who, for the most part, has made her way alone, but made it beautifully, with a fine, sound psychology behind her way of living. This is Mary K. Browne, heralded first in California for her great tennis game, then later in the East for her golf, in which, as a beginner, she eliminated one or two of us who considered ourselves old hands at the game.

The most sensational battle of my life took place with her at the Rhode Island Country Club at Providence, when she as a comparative novice had advanced to the semifinal round of the National Woman's Championship to play against me. She did this by displaying the same courage and power under stress of competition that had made her several times winner of national tennis titles. Just two weeks before this match she had been runner-up to Helen Wills at Forest Hills.

Our game that day at Providence was nip and tuck all the way. Crowds increased as we advanced. Every one was amazed to see such stamina and nerve in this player. Mary K. Browne, a tennis star, but surely not a golf light! At the eighteenth green we had halved the match. We must play an extra hole. On the nineteenth, Mary's drive sailed two hundred yards straight down the fairway. With victory apparently snatched away from me, I made a last valiant stand. My drive equaled hers for distance and position.

The fight was on. It was anybody's match. Our second shots both pitched into traps. We played out, I going past the pin, she short. I putted first. My ball stopped three inches short of the cup. That meant I had had three strokes. Mary was still to play her third.

WITH her ball twenty feet from the hole, a breathless silence descended over the gallery. I stood by, trying to look becalmed, but feeling hot and cold all over. If Mary sunk that putt I was done for. Mary sunk that putt. And that is Mary K. Browne all over. She does what she has to do—at the right moment. She takes her courage by the hand and walks along with it to the last ditch. It never fails her.

But besides this courage in sports, she uses the same brand of living outside sports. As a young woman in California she practiced journalism and practiced it successfully. Later, feeling that business might be more profitable than journalism, she migrated to Cleveland, where she became part owner in a ladies' exclusive sports-wear shop. With the same theory that she holds in sports, "Anything that is worth doing at all is worth doing well," she has built up a distinctive shop, stocking it with the finest things she could procure both in this country and abroad.

One may drop in there any morning, and the same hands that have sent golf balls tearing down fairways and tennis balls cavorting over nets in national competition will fashion a felt hat to fit your head or adjust an Angora sport suit to your particular size. There seems to be nothing at which Mary balks, unless it is something unsportsmanlike. Then, in order to keep her hands in sports, she finds time to give instruction in tennis and win a club championship or two in golf.

As for myself, along with Joyce and Maureen, I, too, have a young brother whom I adore, and a mother, with whom I live in the country just out from New York. I had the misfortune to lose my father recently, but in the past he was always a tremendous incentive to me in sports: a great amateur cyclist of his day, a champion bowler, and an ardent golfer, my childhood ideal, whom I longed to emulate. Because of his own athletic proficiency he was extremely critical of any sport I took up, and insisted I have the proper instruction in it.

When I first commenced golf at fourteen and entered tournament play, he would follow me in my rounds, attempting to do so without my knowing he was there. Often as I walked down a fairway I have thought a certain tree was deformed, but on glancing at it more closely, I realized it was only father, trying to conceal his none too slender form behind it. Many a time his heart must have sunk to see his own flesh and blood make such a mess of her shots, but at least he never spoke of it afterwards. Instead, his way of criticism was a constructive one—more lessons for me, and more practice and playing with him.

After my father's death it seemed to me even more important to perfect my game, and I have thrown much time and energy indeed to the doing of it. But along with this golf passion all other sports interest me. In 1929, in California, I thought for a while tennis was to become my dominating sport. I thought so until later I visited Mary K. Browne in Cleveland. After watching me play tennis she thought golf should still be my guiding star. And golf it is.

But when golf, or swimming, or riding is not in order, what do I do ? For some unknown reason people have always attributed to me a sense of organization. When I was just out of school I was asked to start a new golfing magazine, with New York offices and New York contributors to draw from. I worked steadily a winter on this project, but when spring came I found running a magazine and touring the country in golf competitive play were not compatible undertakings. So I was forced to leave the magazine with a more sedentary person in order to allow me to go my own way with golf.

THE next winter, however, found me back in New York—this time one of the organizers of the Woman's Westchester Golf and Tennis Club. Because I knew the club would be a fine thing if we could finance it, I worked extremely hard to raise my quota, and felt very happy when we were able to put the undertaking over.

Invariably, however, after a winter of organizing and of devotion to business, my mind turns to Europe—and the Joyce Wethereds over there. Four times I have crossed the water to capture the British crown, and four times I have had to return without success. But, goaded on by the sense of the unattainable, I suppose I shall keep crossing until I am either too old to swing a club any longer or until I acquire the yet unattained.

People often ask me if I am not terrified before galleries at these big matches. I think my first experience with a gallery must have been a happy one, for I can frankly say I have never had gallery fears. It happened this way: When I was fourteen in a club match in Providence, it got out that a youngster was playing good golf. Since youth always attracts, during one of my rounds a small group commenced following me, first one person, then another joining the procession, until there were at least a hundred people. But it was all so gradual, and I was so engrossed in my game, that I remember, on the eighteenth green, looking up in amazement to see myself surrounded by people.

HOWEVER, to say I am never nervous over golf matches is a horse of a different color. Often there are not enough soda mints in the world to calm my seething feelings. My face may be composed, but in other respects I am far from that.

The same thing is true of meeting magazine editors. If I had to sell them a tangible thing like an automobile or a plot of land, that would be easy. But to have to sell them my thoughts—my written thoughts—terrifies me. In editorial reception rooms I commence rehearsing to myself my plans for articles with the same nervous haste a child keeps reciting to herself a poem which ten minutes later she must repeat at graduation exercises.

No, organizing and selling are better for me. With this feeling in mind, I went into a real-estate development in Pinehurst. For two winters I worked at this and liked it well enough to consider another venture in California. I have even been thinking of organizing a public golf course, but perhaps miniature golf has obliterated the need for any more legitimate courses. Though I have played the miniature variety several times, I seem to be no adept at it, and I believe my own grandmother could beat me.

THE golf I like is the kind that requires acres of land. The very sight of land intrigues me. In my subconscious mind I see beautiful stretches of fairways ahead, lovely smooth putting greens, and grassy tees from which one may send sweet tee shots. Whatever it is, open country and fresh, clean air call strongly to the golf girl.

But now you see we are not the hammering, hammering, swinging automatons we are supposed to be. Instead we are, like most other people, leaders of double lives—and extremely happy in the leading.

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