RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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Summer, 1998 Volume 33, Number 2

Ramsey County's Women Athletes And a Win at Wimbledon

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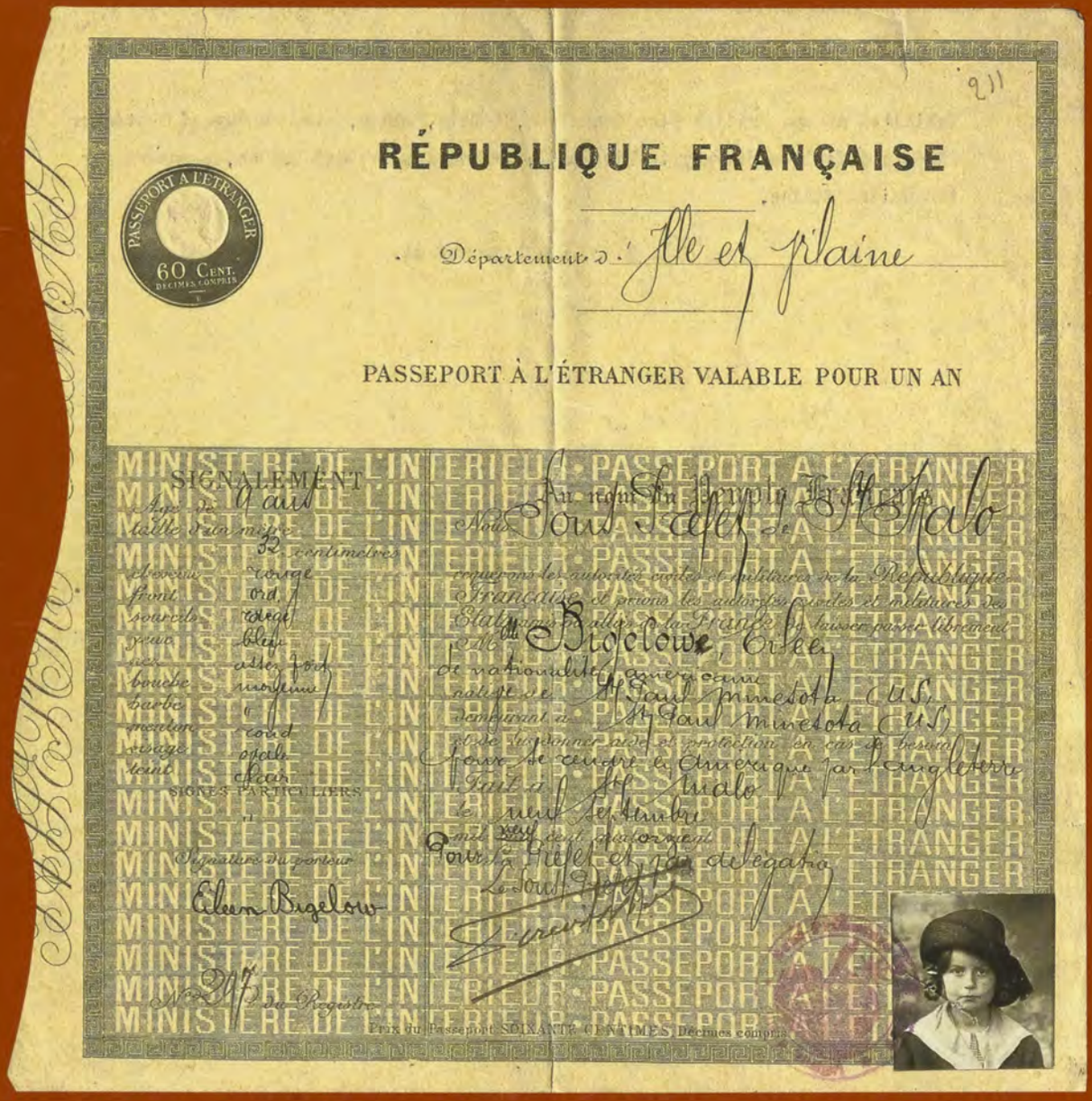
Money Belts Stuffed with Gold
F. R. Bigelow's Dash to France in 1914—*Page 4*



Eileen Bigelow's passport. A notation on the back states: "Exhibited at the British Vice Consulate, St. Malo, France, this 9th day of September, 1914, good for the journey, via Southampton and London, to embark for the United States. H.B.M.'s Vice Consul." Her father's account of his trip to France begins on page 4.

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RAMSEY COUNTY

History

Volume 33, Number 2 **Summer, 1998**

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A Message from the Editorial Board

With the winding down of summer 1998 and the beginning of another school year, the lead article in this issue recalls the "Guns of August," F.R. Bigelow's account of his determined efforts in 1914 to join his wife and children in France and to safely leave that country ahead of the swift advance of the Imperial German Army in the opening days of World War I. Although the United States didn't join the war against Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary until 1917, Bigelow's story of how he was able to get to France via Spain, find his family in the maelstrom of a France caught up in fighting a powerful invader, and return to St. Paul in time for the opening day of school for his young children is not only compelling reading, but also persuasive of where the sympathies of many Americans would lean as the war went on year after year.

Equally as fascinating as Frederic Bigelow's account of the world in the summer of 1914 is Kathleen C. Ridder's examination of the notable success of some of Ramsey County's women athletes in the middle third of this century. Women such as Jean Havlish, Mary Meyers, Jeanne Arth, and Bev Vanstrum achieved prominence and public acclaim for their victories in softball, bowling, speed skating, tennis, and golf long before federal legislation prohibited discrimination based on gender in educational programs that received federal funds. From "A League of Their Own" to the Olympics, these women led the way for the next generation of women athletes in Ramsey County and Minnesota. Despite their pioneering efforts, few of these athletes are known today because all too often they and their achievements were regarded as exceptions (which they were for their times) rather than as role models for those young women who would come after them.

John M. Lindley, chair, Editorial Board

A Win at Wimbledon in 1959

Links, Courts, Lanes, Diamonds —Ramsey County's Women Athletes and Their History of Success

Kathleen C. Ridder

Except for a handful of well-known stars, women athletes have tended to be overshadowed by the male luminaries of the links, courts, lanes, and diamonds. Yet, women have a long history of success in competitive sports. In 1898, according to a brief notice in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, women were playing football in the East. In Minnesota, they were playing softball or kittenball, the state's small towns regularly fielding teams such as the Indoor Baseball Team formed in SpringValley around 1909. In time, their opportunities to compete in tennis, baseball, skating, bowling and other sports increased as more facilities were built.

Ramsey County has had its share of athletes who have cornered medals, trophies, and coverage by the press. The following account of some of their achievements is based on newspaper clippings and the oral histories of six remarkable women whose careers in sport began back in the 1930s and 1940s when few teams included women and few coaches encouraged women. They are referred to here by the nicknames that were often attached to them during their playing years.

Those years weren't easy, those decades before the passage in 1972 of Title IX, which prohibited sexual discrimination in educational programs that received federal funds. As a result, many of Ramsey County's pioneering players, encouraged mainly by their own families, had their starts on the playgrounds of St. Paul. Today, with the explosion of girls' and women's participation in competitive sports, the past achievements of women athletes perhaps have been lost. How many remember that Jeanne Arth won the Wimbledon doubles title in 1959? That Jean Havlish won the Women's International Bowling Congress singles and all-events championships in 1964? That Mary Meyers won a silver medal in speed skating at the 1968 Olympics? That Bev Vanstrum won more state golf tournaments than any other woman in Minnesota?

Eileen ("Twinney") McAndrews O'Neill, now eighty-seven, remembers playing in the Twin Cities Softball League in the mid-1930s. At that time, the number of softball teams in the Twin Cities League varied from six to ten, each sponsored by a different St. Paul or Minneapolis business organization. Teams were made up of ten players because they had a right and left shortstop. Players moved from team to team, either because they were recruited or because a team folded when a business sponsor stopped underwriting the expenses. Only men coached the teams and there were two male umpires for the weekly games. For most of the women, their years playing league ball came after they left high school and before they married, but they started out on the playgrounds maintained by the St. Paul Parks, Playgrounds and Public Buildings department that ran the softball leagues.

An old news clipping of Alice Miller (Meyers), left, Twinny McAndrews (O'Neill), center, and teammate Girlie Grant with the mysterious black bottle trophy. Photos with this article are from the women's scrapbooks.

"Twinney" McAndrews (O'Neill) grew up on Van Buren Street in the midway district, close to Horton playground where she began to play organized softball. Florence (Sis) Olson, another member of several Twin City League softball teams, still lives in her family home on Maryland, close by the Sylvan playground on Rose Avenue West, the place of her early softball years. Twinney and her twin, Evaleen, learned the rudiments of the game from their father, a former player. He admonished them, "If you don't learn to throw, catch, and run like a man, I won't waste my time." Of the twins, it was Twinney who achieved the greater success. She took to the game and became so adept at running the bases, sliding into the bag to beat out a throw, that her mother often moaned to the spectators, "Is she hurt? Did she get up?"

Sis Olsen also picked up the game, playing with boys and girls at Sylvan, and in time she joined the girl's team that played in the city playground league. By 1931 she was on the roster of Progress Players of the Twin City League and later joined the teams sponsored by Dockmans Jewelers, Harry Bermans Sports, and Meyers Dairy. Twinney's boss at Montgomery Wards, where she worked in the accounts payable department, asked her to join their team. Both Twinney who played shortstop, and Sis, at short or third, were members in 1935 of the

Bermans team whose pitcher was the late Alice Miller Meyers. Her family lived on the flats of the West Side and she probably learned the game on Baker field

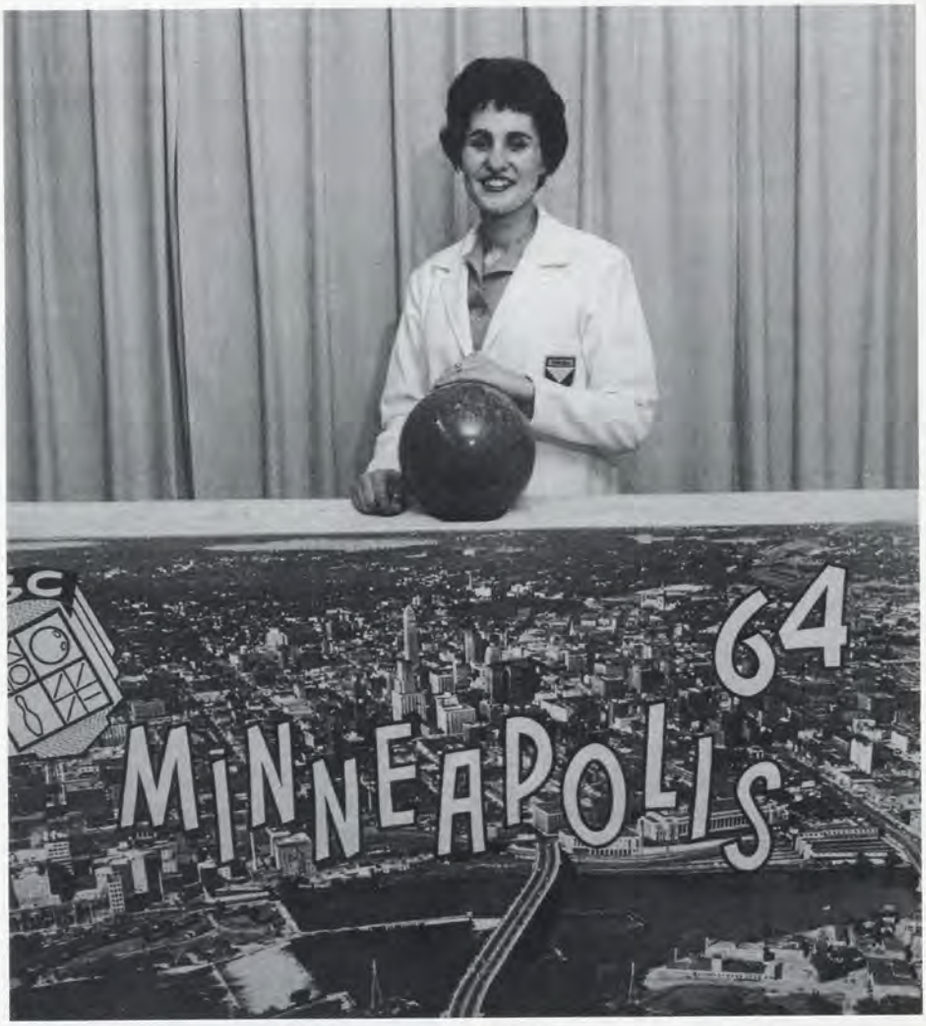
She began her career as a young pitcher on the Astor theater junior girls team, and then moved to Dockmans Jewelers, Bermans, and finally the Meyers Dairy roster. Newspaper articles in 1934–37 accorded Alice much print because she pitched so many winning games and could "hurl a great ball."

Twin City League Winners

In 1935 the Bermans team, crowned winners of the Twin City League, boasted of international supremacy because they had beaten Winnipeg in the annual battle between that city and the Twin Cities. The trophy for this international event was a *black bottle*. Neither Sis nor Twinney knew the origin of the prize, but both assumed that someone picked up a discarded bottle from the ballfield and announced that the teams were to play for that bottle.

Spurred on by these wins, the Berman team drove to Chicago to compete for the national title. Their opponent was the Cleveland Bloomers and theirs was the only game played in Lincoln Park. Twinney reported that Bermans lost 11–10 because of an error by an infielder who wanted to show off her throwing arm. The Bloomer girls had loaded the bases, there were two outs, and the batter hit a line drive to the infielder. Instead of putting her foot on the bag, the infielder threw to first, a throw that went over the head of the first baseman. Back in the hotel, the team spent a good deal of time in tears. Even after so many years, Twinney's irritation at the loss has not lessened. "It was," she remembers, "a mighty long, quiet drive home."

However, as a 1935 newspaper article reported, 2,500 spectators had watched the Bermans players beat the Winnipeg team at St. Paul's Dunning field to cinch the International Title series between Canada and Minnesota. Asked about the crowds, Twinney and Sis said, "Oh, yes, we drew such numbers." The bleachers, they recalled, always were filled and the fans stood two deep behind the fences. News accounts reported 1,000 to 2,000 boosters cheering the teams on, an indication of the exciting and excellent ball the women played.



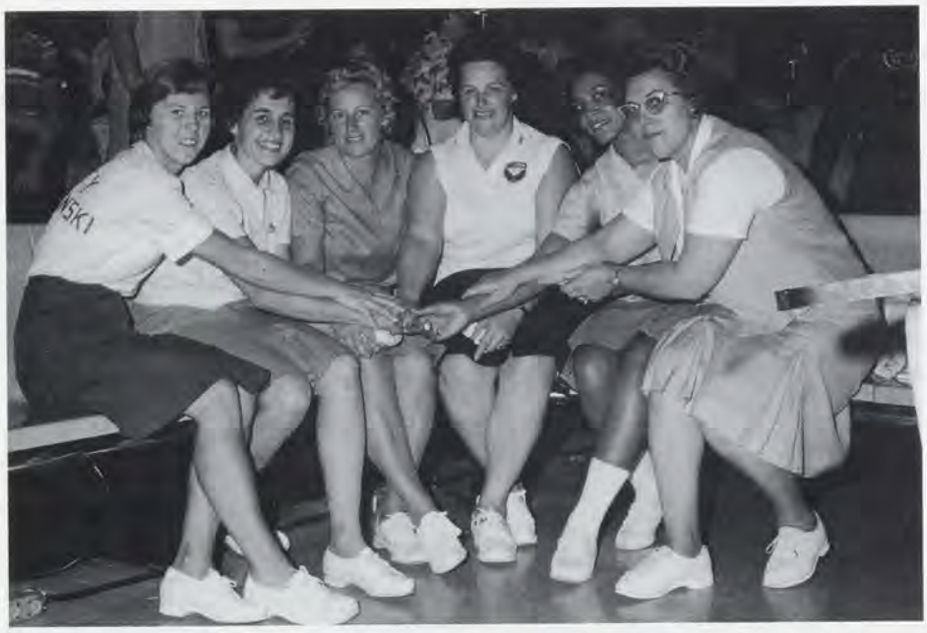
Jean Havlish in May, 1964, when she became the first Minnesotan in the forty-four-year history of the Women's International Bowling Congress to be crowned the singles and all-events doubles winner.

What really drew the fans were the games played from the backs of donkeys. Players either fielded from a straddling position on their mounts or jumped off to retrieve and throw the ball. The at-bat player hit the ball from a standing position, then mounted a donkey to ride the bases. The men played four such games and the women one at Lexington ballpark; all told, they drew 30,000 spectators who had a hilarious time watching the antics of players on donkeys attempting to play ball.

By Truck to Winnipeg

To travel to games the girls were driven by parents or a few boyfriends who had cars. In July, 1937, on a lengthy trip from the Twin Cities to Winnipeg, the team rode for twenty-two hours in an open Meyers Dairy truck, sitting on benches usually occupied by milk cans. In the opening game of the series, the team played rather poorly, due to the long drive, but won the next two games when Alice Miller Meyers pitched well-controlled ball.

Both Twinney and Sis remembered that no matter if they won or lost, the players had fun, often ending their games, while on the Berman team, at the Budweiser Tavern on University and Dale. And they had fans in the stands. One man approached Sis with a nicely wrapped package as she returned to the dugout



Jean Havlish, second from left, with the team that took first place in Indianapolis in 1966.

after an inning. He said, "This is for you Sis, I like watching you play." She was teased when she opened the package to discover a silver cigaret lighter, which she still has, and Lady Esther bath powder. The teasing continued for awhile, but her fan never appeared again.

Alice was married in the spring of 1937 to Joe Meyers and Twinney was her maid of honor. Alice retired from softball after the 1937 summer season, and so did Twinney, who had decided that she had reached the age when it was no longer appropriate for a woman to play ball. Sis enjoyed the game so much that she continued in the league for another six years.

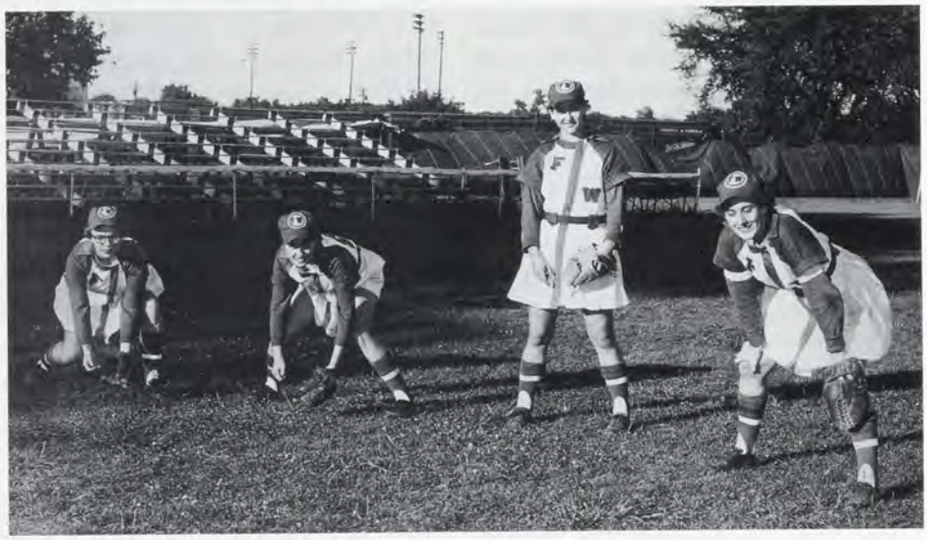
Not long after they retired, Jean Havlish followed in their footsteps, developing her baseball skills at the Rice-Lawson playground on Marion Street. Born in 1935, Jean by the age of ten was part of the baseball culture in the Rice street area. She seized every opportunity to join a pick-up game. Her chance to join a team came when a member of the Rice-Lawson softball team was injured during a game at the Scheffer playground. She had ridden her bike to the playground to watch the game, never thinking that she might have the chance to play. They put her in at shortstop. She remembers that, "The first batter was Evie Flaherty, a left-hander. She shot a line drive at me that I almost didn't even see. It hit me right in the bread-basket and I couldn't help but hold on to it. Well, they thought I was the greatest and I was on the team for the next several years." In 1947 the team won the city championship in its division.

To begin with, Jean played with a cast-off mitt but at the age of twelve she wanted a glove of her own. The Sporting Goods Store in downtown St. Paul carried a Hank Bauer glove that was her dream to own. It cost $18, a lot of money for a young girl. Accumulating enough pennies to buy the glove was a frustrating process, so she asked her father, who cleaned furnaces, if she could help him during the summer. At least four times a week she biked down to the store to pound her hand in the glove and dream about the day she would own it. Finally, after a two-week job cleaning furnaces with her father in Granite Falls, Minnesota, she had enough money to buy her own new glove.

Chicks, Peaches, Daisies

Among the playground afficiondos, the young baseball player was known as a comer. Jean's ambition was to play professional baseball. Around 1949 she read an article in *Parade Magazine* about Philip K.Wrigley, founder in 1943 of the All-American Girls Baseball League, who lived in Chicago. Jean and her father took the train to Chicago in the summer of 1950 to seek out Wrigley and his league, After reaching their hotel room, Howard Havlish turned to his daughter and said, "We're leaving. We can't afford the room." They found an affordable room but no baseball team. The All-American Girls Baseball League had been taken over by Arthur Meyerhoff in 1947 and the nearest team, they learned, was in Racine, Wisconsin.

Undaunted, in late summer they went to Racine for a tryout with the Belles. (All the teams in those days had unabashedly



Shortstop Jean Havlish , right, with other Professional League players.

sexist names such as the Chicks, Peaches, and Daises.) Nummy Derringer, the Racine team's manager, invited Jean, dressed in her graduation suit, to take part in infield practice. He was sufficiently impressed to tell the Havlishes to contact him the following season in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where he would be managing the Lassies. A three- week tryout with the Lassies late in 1951 ended with a promise that Jean would hear from them over the winter. She didn't. Ever hopeful, in the late summer of 1952 she wrote to the Fort Wayne Daisies to request a tryout at shortstop. They recognized her potential and kept her on their roster until the end of the season, allowing her to play in several games.

By the time practice rolled around the following spring, no letter had arrived from either Kalamazoo or Fort Wayne, Jean began to think that a professional baseball career was not to materialize. However, when she returned home from high school on April 22, 1953, an air mail special delivery letter awaited her stating that the Daises had traded shortstop Dottie Schroeder to Kalamazoo and Jean should report for spring training. That was the beginning of a two-year stint as starting shortstop for the Daisies. "I was playing professional baseball with the best women players in the world and getting paid to do it. I was in seventh heaven."

The Daisies won the League championship in 1953, amid general agreement that if there had been a rookie of the year award it would have gone to the Daisies' eighteen-year-old shortstop. The team went on to win the League title the next year. It was a vigorous life that the women led, with games every day or night and rattling by bus to the four cities (South Bend, Indiana; Rockford, Illinois; Kalamazoo, and Grand Rapids, Michigan) that made up the league. Each team had a manager and a chaperone. On the field the players were to appear to be nothing but healthy, wholesome, *all-American girls*. Nevertheless, play was intense; the players suffered spiking in sliding into base, wild pitches that landed on a batter, throws from one base to another that hit a runner, brushbacks at the plate, skin burns, twisted ankles, bruises, and the usual colds all meant that the life of a women's professional ballplayer was not easy.

In the beginning, the games were well attended, but with the arrival of televised big league ball attendance began to sputter. The Fort Wayne team and the league folded after the 1954 season. The league had lost $60,000. It was a huge disappointment for the players. Jean was in tears after she read the letter announcing the league's demise. However, her consolation has been that she played in the only women's professional hardball league that existed in the United States.

Jean found a new challenge when her fellow workers at St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company asked her to join their Friday night bowling league. She averaged 126 a game for her first year. The top average was about 140 and she remembered that "I was just very competitive and wanted to beat that score." Her competitiveness and skill moved her from one level of competition to a higher one until she became a member of the 7Up team in the St. Paul Ladies All Star League.

First to Be Honored

After five years of bowling, Jean won the Minnesota State All-Star Match game crown in 1962 and 1963. Her big victory came in May, 1964, when she became the first Minnesotan in the forty-four-year history of the Women's International Bowling Congress (WIBC) Tournament to be crowned the singles and all-events winner. In this extraordinary accomplishment, she won the all-events (singles, doubles, and team) with the record total of 1,980.

A testimonial dinner in her honor, cosponsored by the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce and the St. Paul Women's Bowling Association, was held August 5, 1964, at the St. Paul Hotel and attended by about 229 tenpin enthusiasts from around Minnesota. In her tribute, Emma Paler, WIBC executive secretary, pointed out that the WIBC was the largest women's sports organization in the world with a membership of 2.6 million. Jean was presented with a transistor radio, a watch, a Capitol City award from St. Paul, two pieces of luggage, and two WIBC medals with diamond pins.

After her WIBC win, Jean decided to go pro because "I wanted to compete against the best in the U.S." During her early summer practice she complained that her game wasn't clicking and had lost some of its sharpness. But Jean was a strong proponent of practice. She had perfected her bowling with the help of her doubles partner, Margo Dalsen, who changed her approach and delivery when she first started as a kegler. By the time of the Pontiac, Michigan, professional tournament, Jean was back in her old form, winning $825 and placing second in her first event on the professional tour.

Jean remained a professional kegler for about ten years. Competing in events depended upon how close the tournaments were to the Twin Cities and how much vacation time she had from her employment at the State Department of Education and, later, from 3M. The all-time top fifteen Professional Women's Bowling Association money winners in 1970 listed her in seventh place with winnings totaling $11,380. She won three professional titles at Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1966 and she won two more in 1969 at Fort Smith, Arkansas, and Kansas City, Missouri. Her final recognition was her induction in 1987 into the WIBC Bowling Hall of Fame in St. Louis, Missouri.

St. Paul's famous women's kegler travels once a week from Rockville, Minnesota, where she now lives, to bowl with her old league because she still loves the sound of the ball rolling down the alley into a strike. She said that "I attribute my success to my God given talents and hope that I have used these talents in a manner that reflects my gratitude and honors Him." She points to her parents, Howard and Mary Havlish, as the mainstays of her life, who always supported her. Her mother had been a great source of comfort when Jean learned before the age of twenty that her professional baseball career had come to an end with the demise of the All American Baseball League. Mary Havlish had said to her then that, "These things happen and later in life you will find the answer." Jean Havlish quickly found the answer in bowling.

Winning at Wimbledon

Jeanne Arth, who started her tennis ca-

Jeanne Arth, age six in 1941, at the St. Paul Tennis Club. She is the only Minnesotan to win a Wimbledon championship.

reer at the St. Paul Tennis Club, is the only Minnesotan to win a Wimbledon championship. She won the doubles title with Darlene Hard in 1959. The biggest thrill of Jeanne's life came a year earlier when she and Darlene won the U.S. National doubles in a stunning victory over Althea Gibson and Maria Bueno at the Longwood Cricket Club in Brookline, Massachusettes. Arth's usual doubles partner, Janet Hopps, had come down with back trouble that summer and Jeanne spent the season playing doubles with different partners. Meanwhile, Darlene Hard, who had won the Wimbledon twice with Althea Gibson, was away from the circuit, working as a counselor at a summer camp in Boston. Jeanne persuaded her to compete in the doubles "just for fun." Although Darlene put in a morning's work each day before the matches, she and Arth surprised the tennis world by winning the tournament.

Arth and Hard were the youngest and unseeded (players are seeded according to rank in tennis tournaments) players ever to win when they beat the Wimbledon champions. Gibson ranked first in singles, and Bueno, second; as partners they ranked first in doubles. It was presumed that the champions would have an easy match of it. They won the first set 2–6 but in the second and third sets the youngsters came alive. Jeanne, alert at net, unleashed a string of volleys that rivaled anything that had been seen before on the Longwood courts, and she and her partner won the next two sets.

Her victory was the culmination of a long association with tennis that began when she was five years old. In 1940 the Arth family moved to 1083 Osceola Avenue, a house four doors west of the St. Paul Tennis Club. Jeanne and her mother, now ninety-one, still live in the modest one story home. Soon after the move, Jeanne and her sister, Shirley, who was two years older, began to acquire their tennis skills by hitting balls with dime store racquets against the backboard at the club. Jeanne was small for her age; at five she weighed only 40 pounds and stood 46 inches tall. Her mother made a set of cotton suspenders to keep her shorts from slipping down over her hips when she and her sister began to play on the courts. The Arths couldn't afford a membership in the club but Louis Soukup, the pro, not only encouraged them to play but coached them, as did their father, Leonard Arth, who was known as the semi-official professional at the club. Soukup became Jeanne's lifelong friend and unofficial teacher. As early as age twelve she had won the Northwest Tennis Association 15 and Under Division in singles and doubles with her sister, and then added the 18 and Under titles to her wins.

There were no young members at the club who could compete with the sisters, so they often played with women who wanted a game of doubles or who needed a fourth. Kelly Davis and Jane Griggs played against the sisters. Kelly remembered that "We enjoyed playing with them except when they lobbed the ball to the base line and followed it with a short drop shot. Jane and I didn't want to constantly run after these balls and finally told them we wouldn't play if they continued. We wanted to return a hard service and have rallies at net. It was also much better for the girls to develop a rounded doubles game than constantly popping the ball over the net."

Jeanne must have taken their comments to heart because she developed a strong serve, a powerful return of service and a penetrating net game. When she was fifteen, she and Norm MacDonald played against Doris Hart and Vic Seixas in an early round of the U.S. National Mixed Doubles. They lost the match but Jeanne won many points with her forehands. Afterwards Seixas said to MacDonald; " You must have thought I was crazy out there, going after her forehand like that. But I couldn't help it. I couldn't believe a little girl hit a forehand like

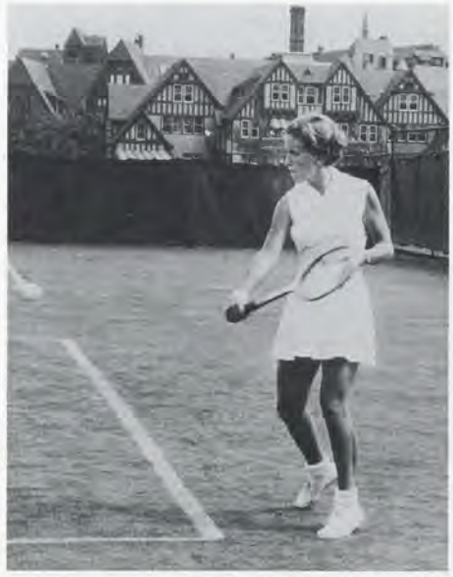
that." Jeanne never had the year-round coaching that was available to the rising young California players, but playing with adults helped her develop her game.

Philadelphia in 1948

Sports were played according to seasons when Jeanne was young. Being a natural athlete and a competitor, at the end of the summer she could be found on the Linwood school playground passing the ball with a flick of her wrist some thirty-five yards in a game of touch football (naturally), with the boys. They recognized her ability because she was never the last to be chosen for a team. When the tennis courts were flooded in winter Jeanne joined the boy's hockey games, skating with the puck around her teammates. She was the best hockey player in the neighborhood. Football and ice hockey were not considered lady-like at that time, so Jeanne concentrated on tennis, but only for the four months of summer.

Encouraged by their successes in local tournaments, the Arth sisters, aged thirteen and fifteen, journeyed to Philadelphia in 1948 to play in the 18 and Under U.S. Girls' National Tournament. Their trip was sponsored by the Northwest Tennis Patrons who helped Jeanne with expenses throughout her career. Jeanne remembers that "They didn't have 14-and-Under, 16-and-Under and all those categories in those days. It was strictly 18-and-Under, so that's the bracket I played in as a thirteen-year-old. I lost in the third round that year, but for each of the next four years I got to either the quarterfinals or semifinals. In doubles, Shirley and I were runners-up in 1951, and once I also was runner-up with Gwyneth Johnson." Shirley retired but Jeanne continued her career at the junior nationals and in her final year she won the sportsmanship cup.

Besides strong support from the members of the St. Paul Tennis club, the sisters were encouraged by others outside the Twin Cities. A fortuitous meeting with Mary Hardwick Hare at their first National Girl's Tournament gave them a mentor who opened doors for them to enter tournaments and provided them with equipment. Hare, and her husband, Charles, became life-long friends of the

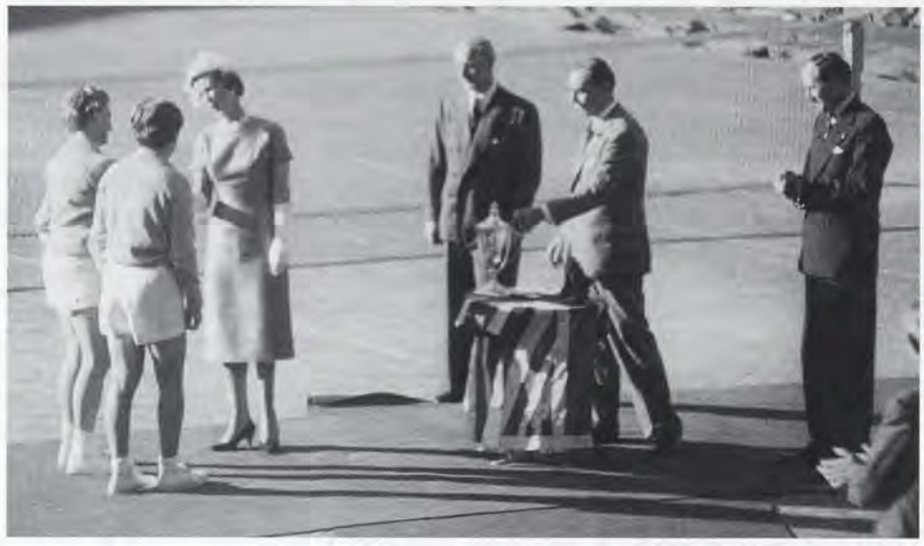


Jeanne Arth at the U. S. Women's Championship games at Forest Hills, New Jersey, in 1958

family. The Hares were English and by this time had become tennis pros. Mary Hare worked for the Wilson Sporting Goods Company and gave tennis clinics throughout the tennis world. After a match, she often played tennis with the girls, giving them pointers about the game. Once she advised Jeanne to throw the ball higher when she served. The Hares lived in Chicago where they were hosts for the girls when they played there.

It is remarkable that Jeanne eventually achieved such high rankings in women's tennis (fifth in 1958 in singles and first in 1958–1959 in doubles). This was an even greater achievement, considering that when she was eighteen she entered the College of St. Catherine and for the next four years, with the exception of competing in the College Girls Championships in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1954 and 1957, she played tennis only in local tournaments. There were no opportunities available then for women who wanted to continue their educations and participate in sports at the same time. Colleges did not offer intercollegiate athletic scholarships, as they do today because of Title IX. Jeanne worked as a secretary to pay for her college tuition—one summer at Baumeister Construction and three summers at the Minnesota Highway Department.

She resumed her tennis career in the summer of 1957 at the end of her first year of teaching physical education at the Academy of Holy Angels in Minneapolis. Because of her successful career as a junior player, she had "the bug in her head" to try the seniors. Mary and Charles Hare also urged her to compete. Jeanne was an unknown tennis quantity with no national rank, but because the Hares commanded much respect in the tennis world, their recommendation was her entry into tournaments. It was not long before she justified their faith as she began to win her matches. Because of her natural abililty, her height now at 5'6,"



The Duke and Duchess of Kent presenting the trophy at Wimbledon to Jeanne Arth, left, and Darlene Hard.

her competitive spirit and quick victories, the players soon recognized Jeanne as a formidable opponent. At the National Clay Court championships in Chicago, she was beaten in the quarter finals by Althea Gibson but reached the doubles finals. Her play in half-a-dozen major tournaments in 1957 was so impressive that she was seventh in the singles rankings for that year and fifteenth with Pat Naud in doubles.

Welcome Homecoming

The headline in the September 9, 1958, issue of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* read "Still Speechless' Says Jeanne at Homecoming." In the St. Paul Union Depot at the end of a twenty-two hour train ride, William Clapp, president of the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce, presented Jeanne with a large bouquet of roses. Mayor Joseph E. Dillon was among the crowd of welcomers that included her family and such longtime supporters as Marguerite Davis and Lew Soukoup. The well-wishers then piled into cars to form a motorcade behind a police escort that led them to the Arths' home. The recognition was well deserved. Jeanne had won the national doubles with Darlene Hard and had reached the semi-finals in the singles, only to be beaten by her doubles partner 7-5, 6-2.

Having won the U.S. National doubles, the women were invited to compete the next year at Wimbledon, June 20–July 4, 1959. After a winter of teaching at Holy Angels, Jeanne had to quickly get her game up to speed. To add to her hard serve, quick court coverage, and accurate volleys, Jeanne developed a devastating drop shot on return of serve. She entered the French championship at Roland Garraults in Paris and survived the first two rounds of the singles, but was ousted in the third by a Frenchwoman, Paule Courtelx, 6-1, 8-6. In the doubles, she and her partner, a woman from Czechoslovakia, lost in an early round. What she actually brought away from France were blistered feet from slipping and sliding on the clay courts.

The grass courts of England appealed much more to Jeanne. She adjusted her game from clay to grass and achieved noteworthy success in the pre-Wimbledon tournaments. In the Wimbledon singles she reached only the third round, a disappointment, but she had greater success in doubles. By this time her standing in doubles was so well-known that Harry Hopman, the czar of Australian tennis, wrote and asked if she would play in the mixed with Bob Monk who was ranked high among the Australian men. The mixed doubles team reached the semifinals. She and Darlene Hard were ranked number one in the women's doubles and justified their placement by winning over Fleitz (U.S.) and Truman (England), 2-6, 6-2, 6-3. The Wimbledon champions recaptured their National Doubles title at Longwood, Massachusetts, later that summer.

The Meyers sisters, Mary, center, Nancy and Kate, champion speed skaters.

Jeanne was most impressed with the fabulous Wimbledon tournament where 20,000 spectators packed the courts every day and lined up overnight for the few daily admissions. "It was very quiet," she recalled, "even with all those people. The women were dressed in hats and gloves. A good shot was applauded politely. It was almost like being in a cathedral to be on center court. The etiquette of entering center court, curtsying to the royal box, and the formality of the coin toss for first serve was very different from the more relaxed American way," she explained.

Jeanne credited part of her success in doubles to her "terrific partner," Darlene Hart. Tennis experts felt, though, that she could have become the world's top player if she had devoted more time to

tennis. However, at the end of her third season on the tour Jeanne is quoted as saying, "I don't think I will ever devote full time to tennis. I guess I play for fun and I think that it would cease to be that if all I did was travel from one tournament to another. It's no fun to play in the big tournaments because there is too much tension." After the rigors of the 1959 European and National tours she retired and welcomed her return to Holy Angels.

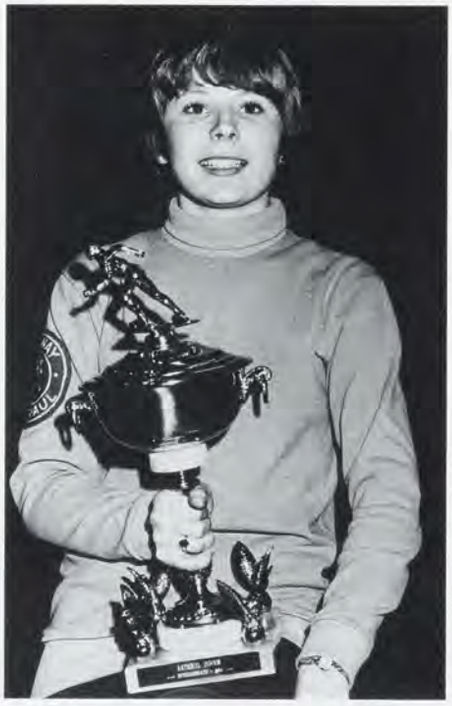
Thirty years later Jeanne revisited Wimbledon. She stayed two weeks with the Hares, who had returned to England and lived in a huge home built in 1693. The most rewarding moment of the visit was seeing her name on the plaque listing the winners of the women's doubles. "I was filled with pride. It was a visual affirmation that I had actually played and won on Wimbledon's center court!"

Olympic Speed Skater

What impresses one about Mary Meyers Berger was how complete her dedication to the sport of speed skating had been. She started skating at age six and retired after winning a silver medal in the 1968 Olympics when she was twenty-two. "Skating was not a part of my life, it *was* my life. It was my identity. Within the context of speed skating the goal was to win and I wanted to win," she has said. In a June, 1975 *St. Paul Pioneer Press* interview, she commented: "One thing is true. I like to do things well. I don't see any sense in messing around with mediocrity." And she felt the same way about her grades in school; she always wanted to be near the top of her class.

It was her sister, Barbara, who interested Mary in speed skating. Barbara had been introduced to the sport by a friend whose father was a speed skater. Ten years older than Mary, she also is credited with involving her other younger sisters, Nancy and Kate, in the sport. The sisters soon discovered their potential when they begin to win Sunday afternoon novice races on Lake Como in St. Paul. It wasn't long before they were picked up by the Midway Speed Skating Club whose tradition has been to develop novice skaters into national champions as role models for the youth of the community.

By 1963, Mary, Nancy and Kate, often the youngest skaters in their class, had won eighty-six trophies and 203 medals. Although they were small for their age, all three were fast and smart and knew how to jockey for position. Skaters usually raced in packs of six. At national events there could be thirty skaters in a class, requiring the racers to skate in three heats, a semifinal and then a final. The Nationals took place over a



Mary Meyers with one of her trophies.

Winter Carnival week-end before crowds of 6,000 to 7,000. For the young skaters it was a grueling test, especially in below-zero weather, with a strong wind blowing through their woolen clothes, not the synthetic fabrics of today. Before the races began, Mary was so scared that she was sick at times. In a race, the girls' technique was to skate behind taller, heavier girls, and then near the finish line with a fast break close in to win. Other times they used a fast breakaway from the post to get out ahead of the pack before the first treacherous and dangerous corner.

Mary's initial national title came in January, 1957, when she placed first in the National Outdoor Midget Girls. She was ten years old and 4'5" tall. Nancy followed with her first title in 1959 but between 1957 and 1964 the Meyers sisters either won or placed in the midgets, juvenile, junior or intermediate competitions. They won trophies and medals not only at Lake Como but also at the 10,000 Lakes championships in Minneapolis, the Great Lakes Open in Allis, Wisconsin, and the Indoor Nationals in Lake Placid, New York, to name a few other venues.

Each win was bought with hours and hours of training. The sisters trained together because no other girls in the neighborhood skated. Sometimes it was lonely to be different. They didn't wear white skates like the other girls; their boots were black and only boys wore black leather boots. Nancy recalled their runs in winter through the streets close to where they lived on Robert Street in West St. Paul. Joe Meyers, their father, drove the car slowly behind them with the lights on as protection. With none of today's Nordic track equipment to strengthen their thighs, he procured canvass money bags from a bank and filled them with sand. The girls held the bags between their legs and from a croutching position threw them back and forth to each other.

In the winter of 1964, Mary ended a successful speed skating season. She won four consecutive titles over four week-ends, capping her string of victories at the National Outdoor championships on Lake Como where she was first in the intermediate class. However, she failed by 4/10th of a second to qualify for the 1964 Olympics. Nancy had stopped skating because she had contracted hemolytic anemia, and Kate never developed into as competitive a skater as her sisters. Now at St. Joseph's Academy in St. Paul, eighteen years old, and with college in her future, Mary was faced with the question of whether to try out again for the Olympics in 1968. Olympics trials were run against the clock (metric racing), not racing in the typical American pack style competition.

Mary left the sport for almost two years because she had grown bored with speed skating. "Skating and training were no longer fun and I decided that I had won as many honors as I wanted," she told the press. However, her father disputed her reasons; he thought her ambi-

Skating for the gold. Mary Meyers in The Netherlands in 1967.

tion was to skate in international competition and he was proven right.

The Gold in Holland

By the summer of 1966, Mary was getting back in shape under the tutelage of her longtime coach, Henry Heil. He now used a rigid Norwegian training program called dry training that consisted of calisthenics and exercises to perfect one's form and style. The American pack style of competition does not necessarily lend itself to the development of technique. The Europeans skate against the clock, eliminating the bumping and pushing that can occur in packs. Mary intensified her running program, running five to six miles an hour. To run on a dirt track, she climbed over the link fences surrounding various high school fields. To increase her speed, she rode a bike on country roads. The bike was ordered by mail from Italy because there were no 10-speed cycles for women in this country. Cars slowed down on the country roads as they passed her. When they saw that she was a woman, they stopped to find out if she was lost! It was out of the ordinary to see a woman riding alone on a deserted road. The culture of the 1940s, '50s, and early '60s trained women to be wives and mothers, not Olympic skaters. Undaunted, Mary trained for seven months, two of them in Norway, to reach the peak that won her a gold medal in the 500 meter race in February, 1967, at the World Speed Skating Championship in Deventer, The Netherlands. She was the second American woman to win a gold medal in speed skating.

In addition to the exhilaration of winning a medal, Mary was overcome by the support of speed skating that she saw among the Dutch. The meet drew 36,000 spectators who watched the event for eight hours straight. She said in a news report after her return to St. Paul that "The fans just went wild, cheering for skaters of every nation. It was not only for the winners. The losers got a tremendous hand just for finishing." She also paid tribute to her parents without whom "I'd never have been able to do any of this." Her father had underwritten all her expenses and, with her mother, had encouraged their daughter at all points in her skating career. Spurred on by her win in The Netherlands, Mary left in March to train for the 1968 Olympics on the indoor track in Milwaukee's suburb of West Allis, which had the only Olympic size track in the country.

The headline read, "Mary Meyers Ties for 2nd in 500." With her teammates Dianne Hulum and Jennifer Fish, she won a silver medal at the 1968 Olympics in Grenoble, France. When the times were announced, the skaters, all friends, fell into each others arms screaming with joy. Charles R. Paul, an Olympic official, said that, "The chances of all three skaters from one country posting identical scores and tying for a medal must be a 1,000 to 1." Her parents and her sister were there to congratulate her. However, Mary was not pleased with her race; she felt that she did not skate as well as she had in The Netherlands. Later she reflected in an article that she hadn't felt good about skating that entire year and it was ironic that she was good enough to place second.

Mary quit skating after the Olympics to marry, but that was not the only reason she retired. Her last year of competition was difficult for her. After winning the 500 meters in The Netherlands in 1967, her commitment to the rigors of training waned. Added to that, her best friend died during that time. And more importantly, she wanted to be another person than a world speed skater. To be that new person she wanted to finish at the University of Minnesota, get her degree in elementary art and teach.

Reviewing her skating career in 1975, Mary said that after the Olympics she had denied that skating had had any effect upon her life but she now realized that it had influenced her. "It's mostly the physical involvement. There's nothing like it when you are into your own body that completely. Why do they go out and practice in 20 degree below weather? It has to be something very, very powerful." She is lyrical in describing skating as an art: "After suffering through years

of training, your body attains a rhythm that propels you across the ice. And the swoosh of the blades as they leave the frozen surface is the beat that moves you. The lean of your body and the swing of your arm work in unison with that rhythm. And the blade glides you across the ice. When all is in balance, the movement is what I like." Mary could be called not only a champion speed skater but also an artist, for she molded her physique to where she achieved exceptional skill in skating.

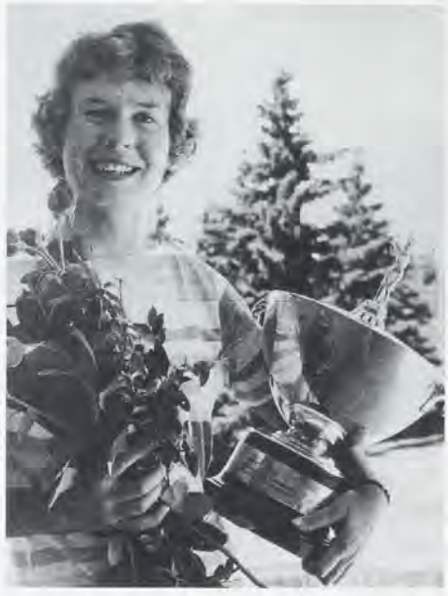
Golf By the Book

Beverly Gammon Vanstrum initially learned to swing a club by reading one of Byron Nelson's books on golf. In 1946, the winter of her fifteenth year, she secretly followed Nelson's instructions in the basement of her home. Bob Gammon, her father and an avid golfer, had been unsuccessful in interesting his daughter in the sport (she favored tennis) until he discovered she had a strong interest in earning money. "He actually tricked me into playing golf. He hired me to be his caddie at seventy-five cents a round the summer I was fourteen," she said.

Her father won the Labor Day Tournament in Montevideo, Minnesota, and the man who had bet on her father to win the tournament gave her a crisp $100 for caddying. She didn't tell her father but to herself she thought, "I think I am going to like this game." The $100 was the last money she saw as an amateur. In addition, watching her father play had piqued her interest. He couldn't believe what a natural swing his daughter had when he first caught her practicing outdoors. She gave up tennis, and under her father's tutelage, "Every evening that summer I was practicing at Keller until the mosquitoes bit us so badly that we had to run for cover." After three months she broke 90 and before the summer was over she won Keller's Women's Club championship.

Bev's improvement, called "phenomenal" in a newspaper article, drew the golf world's attention to her. In 1948, in the first State Women's Public Links tournament, after an initial round of 90 Bev shot an 80 (her father caddied for this round) to be runner-up in the 36-hole event. She rounded out the summer competing both in junior invitationals at clubs and playing in public links events such as the Low Gross Invitational at Highland Park, which she won. The next summer she journeyed to golf venues in greater Minnesota, winning the Birchmont at Bemidji. During that time Bev qualified to play on the boy's golf team at St. Paul Johnson High School. Her achievement naturally aroused consternation among the high school athletic authorities. Should a female student be allowed to play on a boy's team? The St. Paul School Board wrote a letter denying permission because "competition was bad for girls." Her father was so angry that he tore up the letter.

Bev believes University golf coach



Bev Vanstrum, winner of the 1955 State Match Play at Interlachen County Club, Edina.

Les Bolstad's interest in her game was a "big break in her career." Soon after she entered the University, Bolstad invited her to join the men's team when they practiced in the north tower of Memorial Stadium. Of course, there was no women's golf team. Bev then joined the men on their practice rounds at the University Golf Course, at times scoring lower than some of the team members. She was adopted by the team and dated several golfers.

Membership in the University Golf Club made her eligible to play in Minnesota Women's Golf Association (MWGA) tournaments. With her hours of practice, and the competition of playing with the University men and on the MWGA circuit Bev's score dropped at times into the high 70s. She often placed in women's medal play in the top five or won early matches to reach the semi-finals or finals of a competition.

Every spring Bolstad urged her to enter the Women's National Collegiate Golf Championship. Finally, at the end of her senior year she took his advice and went to Columbus, Ohio, to play in the event but not without voicing objections. She told him," I haven't played any golf and we have finals coming up." Bev was as competitive academically as on the golf course. She graduated with highest honors from the College of Education. The deciding factor in her decision to participate was that she now had a traveling companion in Marlene Miller, another University golfer.

Bev entered the competition as a complete unknown. She qualified for the championship flight with an 87, nine strokes behind the low score of 79. When she won her early matches and ended in the semi-finals, beating the favorite and medalist, Pat Lesser of Seattle, the press referred to her as the Cinderella of the tournament. People were surprised that, coming from the land of ice and snow, she was capable of such fine play. She lost in the finals to Mary Ann Villegas from New Orleans when the southerner had a birdie on the last hole. A newspaper headline read "Bev 'Thrilled' Despite Defeat." The story quotes her saying, "Imagine me going to the finals with all those good golfers. I didn't tell them that I had never played like that before." Her parents gave her the trip to Ohio as a graduation present and drove all night to join her on the seventh hole of the final match.

Bill Barrett, the golf pro at the Lafayette Country Club in Minnetonka Beach, also befriended Bev. Barrett's daughter, Bea Barrett Altmeyer, another excellent golfer, also had been taught by her father. Bev's first job was teaching English and Social Studies at Mound Junior High School. As there was no golf

In action. Bev Vanstrum winning the State Match Play at the Minikahda Club in 1953.

course in Mound, Bill invited the new school teacher to play as his guest at Lafayette, and he also arranged for her to play at the Woodhill Country Club in Orono.

Throughout the 1953–54 summer vacations, she was winning tournaments not only on the MWGA circuit but at Invitational venues outside the Twin Cities. She won the 1953 MWGA match play, beating Mrs. H L. Berg. In 1954 she was runner-up in the Women's Western Amateur, won the first Minnesota's Women's Amateur, and was runner-up in the MWGA match play against Marlene Gesell. The St. Paul Lions club presented her with their award as the outstanding amateur athlete of 1954.

Patty Berg, Minnesota's most famous woman golfer, recognized Bev's talent, urged her to join the women's winter tour and wrote letters of introduction to different tournament directors after Bev decided to take time off from teaching at Mound. With another Minnesotan, Mary Jane Warphea, she played in the Florida events at Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood, Palm Beach, and St. Augustine The golfing jaunt lasted nine weeks. They covered 6,200 miles in Warphea's red convertible. Bev's best performances were the finals of the Women's Championship of Palm Beach, and the semis of the mixed foursome tournament at the Everglades International.

Among the spectators at the Palm Beach event was B. H. Ridder, publisher of the St. Paul papers. He offered the fast-rising golfer a job writing color stories for the pro tour if she joined it, and when Pendleton, the clothing manufacturer, approached her with an endorsement contract, Bev decided that she could earn enough to play on the pro tour. Marriage to Bob Vanstrum derailed her professional career. "I fell in love with him and I didn't want to play golf anymore. I wanted to get married and have a family. I didn't stop playing golf, though. I played tournament golf in Minnesota until 1991."

Beginning with her first win in 1953, in the next sixteen years Vanstrum won seventeen titles; combined with her wins in the seniors, she has won 21 tournaments. No other woman in Minnesota has won more golf events. What motivated her to continue to compete for so many years? "Success. My hobby was to play in tournaments. Because every round plays differently there is always a new challenge. It is theater. Weather can change the scenery of a hole overnight. The drama of a match is when you recover after a poor beginning and win with a birdie on the eighteenth hole."

Kathleen Ridder wrote about the founding of the Women's Institute in the Fall, 1997, issue of Ramsey County History.

She did it! Bev Vanstrum's victory jig at the 1968 State Match Tournament at Edina Country Club.
See article on Ramsey County's women athletes, beginning on page 13.

R.C.H.S.
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