

Are Our Courses Right for Women?

By MISS MARGARET CURTIS

We women play our golf on courses laid out for men. Our games are thus under the decided handicap of being real misfits.

In every-day life and in other sports, it is taken for granted that men are stronger than women. We ask our menfolk to unscrew the recalcitrant jar cap because their fingers are stronger than ours. We never did expect Helen Wills to beat Bill Tilden, nor Alice Marble to beat Don Budge. Of course not.

But, *relatively*, don't our Good Girls play as fine golf as Good Men? When you watch Louise Suggs, Glenna Vare, Estelle Page, Dot Kirby or Grace Lenczyk, to mention a few, it is hard to think otherwise. And this leaves out Babe Zaharias as being unique, she being not only an Olympic-team-in-one but an orchestra also.

If Good Girls play as well as Good Men, why are their scores so far apart? Let's start with scores in the 60s. Estelle Page has played in the 60s four times in competition. Louise Suggs three times. Glenna once, and that included a hole in one! The Babe many times. But never has any woman broken 70 in the USGA Championship. The lowest score ever made in the qualifying round was 74.

Now for the men: Last year in sectional qualifying for the Amateur Championship there were at least 25 rounds in the 60s.

What's the explanation? Mightn't it be that the courses as arranged for women are a good deal harder than the architect intended and relatively much harder than for men?

Let's take a case in point: Both amateur championships have been played recently at Pebble Beach in California, the men's in 1947, the women's in 1948. A beautiful but stiff course. The official scorecard shows that for six of the first nine holes the women played from the men's tees with identical yardage. The three women's tees shortened the other holes a total of 85 yards. On the second nine, the women played all but one hole from the men's

THE AUTHOR

Miss Margaret Curtis has long held an unique position in women's golf:

—A competitor in the USGA Women's Amateur Championship 23 times over a 50-year span, the first in 1897 and the latest in 1947;

—USGA Champion 1907-11-12, runner-up 1900-05, medalist six times;

—Co-Donor of the Curtis Cup with her sister, Miss Harriot S. Curtis, who was Champion in 1906. The sisters opposed each other in the 1907 final.

tees: the 17th was shortened from 218 to 190 yards.

In fairness, it should be noted that women's par was 76 as compared with 72 for men. But the course was only 113 yards shorter for women. Could this be a rather cruel compliment?

The crux of this problem isn't the drive but the *shot to the green* and the trajectory (isn't it a grand word?) of the ball—what club *should* be used and what club *is* used by the Good Women for that shot?

If we are agreed that women are mostly playing golf courses out of tune, mightn't we start a modest campaign?

Several groups are concerned: (1) the Ladies in Authority, both the USGA Women's Committee and the State and district committees which run championships; (2) the men of the thousands of club committees; (3) finally, and in some ways the most important, the big bunch of us rank-and-file players.

It isn't reasonable to expect much support from the Championship players. They are in their prime and rejoice in their strength. They are young, and only the thoughtful ones will be interested or see any need for change.

If you are interested in making it possible for women to play the courses comparatively as men do, there are some simple things that could be done.

Let's begin our studies on our home course's one-shot holes. It seems to be ac-



—Courtesy The Detroit News

Miss Margaret Curtis

Fifty years after she first played in the USGA Women's Championship, Miss Curtis was a competitor in the 1947 tournament at the Franklin Hills Country Club near Detroit. This picture was taken on that remarkable anniversary.

cepted that courses should have two one-shot holes in each nine. They usually call for shots of precision, although not necessarily iron shots. They are trapped accordingly. They range from the closely guarded "dropped-egg" hole to one that might call for a 4-wood by men.

It should be remembered that, let's say, a 7-iron for a man is quite a different shot from a 7-iron for a woman, in both length and trajectory.

Let's watch our Good Men play these holes. Let's inquire what clubs they use, and the pro, too. If you have girls in the championship class, find out what clubs they use for each short hole.

After the short holes, let's consider the longest on the course. How do the hazards and distances suit women here?

There is one hole I can think of where a brook crosses the whole fairway at just the questionable distance for two good woods. In medal play, at least, and usually in match, the sensible woman plays short, using perhaps a 5-iron to be safe in the

middle of the longest hole on the course. Then she must approach with a 2-wood. The hole is over 500 yards long and has no women's tee, although the terrain raises no difficulties.

What are the steps that can be taken? First, a careful study of the course. Then, a definite program. Nowadays most courses have several women's tees—some beautifully placed, others still not giving the proper shot to the green. The cost of moving an existing tee or installing a new one in a proper place or making other alterations must be considered.

In the main, men's golf committees have been very sympathetic to women's needs. The fault has been that the women usually haven't realized or asked for what would be good for women's golf. If the men are interested but don't see where the money is coming from, see if there aren't enough women keen to have the course improved who would chip in or have a special "day" and use the entry fees to start the improvements.

I believe a surprise is in store for the women on any reasonable and well-considered request that is put before the men. Chivalry isn't all dead yet, and there is a willingness to give the gals a break.

For the Ladies in Authority: Thought, with these considerations in mind, can be given to placing tees for championships. At a State championship not long ago, the markers on a fascinating but tricky water hole were moved back to the men's tee for the final. One player dared a difficult carry and went splash with a 4-iron. The pro was asked what the Good Men used for this shot. "A number 9," was the answer! Even the women's tee, in this instance, wouldn't give the girls that shot, but it wouldn't be difficult to advance the tee so that they also could play a number 9.

Will the ladies of the USGA Committee give the rest of us a lead over? Will they have the tees placed for our Championship where it is possible for the girls to have the thrill of scoring, like the men, in the 60s? It will take courage.

Of course, we don't want our courses made too easy. Stiff courses develop good players.

But why not the same par for men and women on each course?