

MISS MARGARET CURTIS GRACIOUS YET DYNAMIC

BY

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LOOKING back over the annals of women's golf, few have devoted as much time and energy to the game in this country as Miss Margaret Curtis of Manchester, Mass. and yet she has always kept the sport in proper perspective.

Blessed with an all-embracing and dynamic personality, which she no doubt inherited from her father, a cavalry colonel in the Civil War, and mellowed by her years of close contact with the needy and oppressed through social welfare work, Miss Curtis can look back on 74 years well spent. Her jovial manner is a testimony to her perpetual contentment; her fascinated audience, a sign of the warmth which she radiates.

Miss Curtis was the youngest of ten, five boys and five girls. But if the older ones tried to spoil her, the youngest lady was not for spoiling.

Golf came to the Curtis children in 1893 through their cousin Laurence, a member of The Country Club, Brookline, Mass., and second President of the United States Golf Association, in 1897-98. He sent them a copy of "Golf" from the Badminton Library of Sports, suggesting that they try the coming sport of the future.

Nine Were Charter Members

They lived in the summer only a stone's throw from the newly incorporated Essex County Club, Manchester, Mass., and nine of the family became charter members.

Miss Margaret hit her first shots at the age of 9. Three years later she was competing in her first club championship and astounded all by reaching the final. A dumbfounded colleague came up to a beaten opponent and asked, "How *could* you let that child beat you?" The relegated player scrutinized her stocky opponent and replied, "She's no child; she's a baby grand!"



MISS MARGARET CURTIS, 1903

The following year aged 13, the "baby grand" entered the USGA Women's Amateur Championship on her home course, still the youngest ever to do so in the 57 years of the event. The year was 1897. She qualified fourth out of 29 before taking a hiding from the three-times Champion, Miss Beatrix Hoyt, of Southampton, N.Y., in the first round.

Miss Curtis' revenge for that beating came three years later when she won her way to the final at Miss Hoyt's expense on the twentieth hole at the Shinnecock Hills Golf Club, Shinnecock Hills, N.Y., Miss Hoyt's home course, in the semi-final.

Both had hit good drives to the second extra hole, and after Miss Curtis played the odd she turned in apprehension to her Indian caddie to inquire if her ball had reached a cross bunker.

"Unk," came the reply.

Miss Hoyt then played an identical shot,

and without waiting to be asked her caddie bellowed, "Unk."

As it happened, Miss Curtis' ball had stopped in the opening and she was able to chip up and get her 5 for the match. It was Miss Hoyt's last appearance in championship golf.

Sisters Meet in Final

But fate decreed that Miss Curtis was not to win at the age of 16, and ill health kept her out of several subsequent Championships. So it was not until 1907 that, having qualified first, with sister Harriot second, the two met in the final at the Midlothian Country Club, Blue Island, Ill. The elder Miss Curtis, Harriot, was defending the title she had won the previous year at the Brae Burn Country Club, West Newton, Mass.

The younger sister had always had the edge on the older, and with no quarter asked or given she made very sure that a different first name would be inscribed on the trophy.

By the time Miss Curtis had played in eleven Nationals she had gone through to the finals five times to be beaten twice and to win three times, and in those same years she had made or tied for low medalist score six times. She might have gone on to create an even greater record had she not, at an early age, devoted her life to social welfare which kept her out of championship play for nine years due to World War I.

Simmons College School of Social Work in Boston, held its first year's course in 1904-05. Miss Curtis was an inaugural student.

In the spring of 1905, when she had all but finished her studies, she asked and was granted permission to go to Britain with a party of eight to compete in the British Ladies' Golf Championship. She was allowed to take her final examination papers with her on the ship which she duly completed and posted back on arrival in England.

Excellent though her work was, the Board of Governors after consultation could not see their way to grant her a diploma. Quite undaunted she returned to the College in 1910 and completed the course a

second time, although she was already on the Board of the Family Service Society, a position she has now held for 51 years.

War Years in Paris

When the first World War broke out, Miss Curtis, always an energetic woman, began to champ at the bit for action. Then one day in 1916 she broached the question to her mother of going overseas. The kindly, aging face lit up with an understanding smile. "I was wondering when that was coming," she said.

Miss Curtis set sail to join the Red Cross in Paris where for three years she was chief of the Bureau for Refugees. Many a time she longed to leave the capital for closer contact with the needy, but her past experience and her forte for administration kept her chained to headquarters.

For light relief during these worrying days she did manage to get a few rounds of golf at the St. Cloud Golf Club, on the outskirts of the city, which graciously made her an honorary member. One of her close contacts in Paris was a keen golfer who, in peace time, was an executive with the American Express Company. Unknown to Miss Curtis, he had a van call one day at Manchester, Mass., and to the astonishment of all at home the driver announced that he had called for Miss Curtis' clubs, which were then duly transported to Paris.

Before her return home Miss Curtis took three months' leave of absence from the Red Cross to ally herself with a Quaker organization working in the devastated areas of France, but again her more skilled qualifications recalled her to administrative duties.

In 1921 the American Red Cross organized a Child Health Programme in Central Europe and asked Margaret Curtis to be in charge of the social workers on their staff. This meant going to Poland, Czechoslovakia and Austria, where the Quakers were working, and France.

Again in the winter of 1923 she was sent to Greece to help in the reestablishment of refugees from Smyrna with the American Red Cross.

A woman with such drive and initiative can never sit back and relax. It is doubtful

if Miss Curtis knows what the word means. So, when her work with the Red Cross was over she turned her resources down other channels.

What could she best do to help golf? The first seed in that direction had been sown 'way back in 1905 when she had first played in the British Ladies' Championship. Prior to the event the eight visiting Americans had been challenged to play a combined British team in an unofficial match. The home side had won handsomely, but the exhilaration of the international competition and the good-will established by their visit had stuck in the minds of Margaret and Harriot.

Years later, in 1924, during inter-city matches between Boston, New York and Philadelphia, the idea of international matches was again mooted. Three years later the Misses Curtis offered to donate a Cup for international competition.

Curtis Cup Materializes

Five frustrating years of bargaining passed before the Curtis Cup was finally inaugurated at Wentworth, England, in 1932, under the auspices of the United States Golf Association on the one hand, and the Ladies' Golf Union on the other.

The co-donors still hope that one day the Curtis Cup Matches may embrace many nations for, as the inscription says, it was given "to stimulate friendly rivalry among women golfers of many lands."

Though the name Curtis will go down to posterity through the Curtis Cup, Miss Margaret would prefer to be remembered for the work she has put in fostering girls' junior golf in Massachusetts. Never one to seek recognition at any time, and always ready to play down her own endeavors, she is, nevertheless, justly proud of having started the Massachusetts Girls' Junior Championship in 1930, one of the first girls' junior state events in the country. The perpetual trophy which she donated is a bowl in the shape of a daisy, the winners' names being inscribed on the separate petals.

Miss Curtis recalls a delightful story about one of her "tadpoles," the youngest eligible flight. One particular child whiffed unsuccessfully several times on the first tee

before it was tactfully suggested to her that maybe she should let other couples off first, and she could follow after.

When she reteed, she again had several air shots before making contact.

The worried officials were quite resigned to the fact that she would never have kept tally of the misses, but sure enough when she eventually returned her card the first hole read 31!

So delighted was Miss Curtis with the child's sporting integrity that she awarded her a special prize and drew the moral that one should "never give up nor forget."

The choice of Miss Curtis as the 1957 recipient of the Bob Jones Award was an overwhelmingly popular one. In her written acceptance to the USGA Annual Meeting in Chicago, in January, she spoke not of herself, but of Bob Jones. "I shall try to live up to the honor" was all she had to say in the first person singular.

Yet there can be few who have more to be proud of than Miss Curtis.

Tennis Doubles Champion

Besides her golf she was a fine tennis player, and in 1908 in partnership with Miss Evelyn Sears won the United States women's doubles championship, thus becoming the only woman concurrently to hold national golf and tennis titles.

Again, in all humility, she belittles her tennis prowess. On the first visit to this country of the remarkable Miss Lottie Dod, five times Wimbledon Champion, 1904 British golf champion, and figure-skating champion, Miss Curtis took her on at tennis. "She gave me one game," said the loser recounting the score of 6-1, 6-0.

Miss Curtis was fortunate to grow up in a gracious era, a time when the simple things in life still gave pleasure and each new experience was an adventure. She has remained untainted and her company is as refreshing as a breath of fresh air to a sultry city.

She has actually played in twenty-five national championships—more than any one else—and in her own words, "It represents an unbelievable amount of fun and friendships."