



GOLF FOR CAUSE

Golf – A “Sissy” Sport?

By Debbie Waitkus, Golf for Cause®

I sat in the audience with a smile on my face. I found yet another athletic person who passed on golf because she thought it was a “sissy sport.”



Marilynn Smith dreamed of being a pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals. She was on a mission to make her dream a reality. Marilynn practiced her heart out – she even formed her own team, pitched, and acted as both coach and manager. One afternoon her mother inquired how practice had gone. She let the “S_ _ _” word slip, something she’d learned from the boys on the team. Marilynn endured the Lifebuoy soap in her mouth and awaited her father to arrive home. He dragged her down to the Wichita Country Club. There, he insisted, she could learn a more ladylike game, golf.

Marilynn was inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame this past Monday. The game she considered to be a “sissy sport” has enriched her life in countless ways, including the opportunity to visit all 50 states, 36 countries, and 5 US Presidents.

And you could say that she even achieved her baseball mission - she played in some of the major league stadiums. Marilynn, along with her playing partners, hit golf balls from home plate to encourage baseball fans to come out and watch the ladies play golf at the local golf clubs for LPGA events.

Marilynn, along with 12 other women, founded the LPGA in 1950. While playing on the tour, Marilynn also wore the hat of LPGA President. Her car served not only as a vehicle for transportation, but also as a locker room in the back seat, and the LPGA office in the trunk. For those of us who have organized a fundraiser, or started a business, we know what it takes to roll up our sleeves, function on no sleep and wear all the hats. But do we know what it’s like following that dream, paving a path for others in the future, and being a tour player focused on winning tournaments at the same time?

As I listened to Marilynn, the vision of June Cleaver from the television show “Leave it to Beaver” came to mind. June, waiting for her husband, Ward, to come in the door from a long day at the office is preparing dinner, apron over her long skirt and blouse, high heels, pearls, oven mitt on her hand, holding a baking sheet with hot cookies fresh out of the oven. Lose the heels, apron and oven mitt and you have Marilynn’s golf uniform – complete with the long skirt and pearls. Put some clubs in her hands, and off she goes, playing in tournaments where the yardages were anywhere from 6250 – 6950 yards! (As a basis of comparison, today, the average yardage for an LPGA tour event is 6200-6400 yards.) Babe Zaharias was a long hitter and preferred longer holes. The ladies may have played in long skirts, but the game was not a “sissy” sport.

Like many businesswomen, I was a latecomer to golf. Thirty and pregnant, a co-worker encouraged me to join her to do what I have

always thought was a boring activity. Although I was an athlete, I never even considered golf to be a sport – no team, no running with a ball, and no breaking a sweat. Golf had never even registered on my radar screen.

Larry Nelson played several competitive sports in high school. Golf was not one of them. Like Marilyn, Larry had considered golf to be a “sissy” sport. Inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame along with Marilyn, Larry picked up a golf club for the first time at the age of 21. While in Viet Nam, Larry and a friend sat around dreaming of what they would do once back home in the United States. Larry imagined a cheeseburger, French fries and a chocolate shake. His friend talked about playing golf. Larry listened, curious. Inspired by his friend’s words, after returning home, Larry picked up the game. With determination, it wasn’t long before Larry was a club professional and then a touring pro.

I listened as Vijay Singh, another inductee to the World Golf Hall of Fame, expressed his appreciation for the game and the opportunities it’s given him to travel the world and to meet the most wonderful people. Those of us who play golf would echo Vijay’s sentiments.

Although Vijah didn’t think golf was a “sissy” sport, he shared a determination to succeed with the other inductees. Vijah’s road to the World Golf Hall of Fame has been long in both miles and time. His advice on how to be successful: “I’ve beat a lot of balls. You just need to keep on going and believe in yourself. It’s the best thing you can do.”

Golf, whether or not you believe it to be a “sissy” sport, has given Marilyn, Larry and Vijay a platform to inspire each of us to do our very best, to work hard, and to achieve a vision.

Take a swing and follow through. No guarantees for induction into the World Golf Hall of Fame. But you’re sure to enjoy the scenery and make some wonderful friends along the way. *Turn golf into gold.*[®]

Debbie Waitkus a golf consultant, speaker and trainer, is the owner and founder of Golf for Cause, LLC. She speaks to corporate groups and stages creative golf programs, especially for women, to help them drive better business opportunities through the world’s most popular game. Turn golf into gold.[®] Debbie can be reached at 602/722.3605 or dwaitkus@golfforcause.com.