

A WOMAN AS HEAD PROFESSIONAL



Mrs. Helen Finn talks about her reception as head professional at Douglaston Park GC in a job traditionally the exclusive preserve of men

by DICK MILLER

Babe Didrikson Zaharias changed the U.S. Open. In 1948 she announced that she was going to compete in the most prestigious golf event in America. The United States Golf Assn. was stunned. Old men and adolescents had competed, but never a woman. By tradition, the Open was for men, yet at the time there was nothing in the eligibility rules restricting the competition to men. In a moment of swift discretion, the USGA announced that the Open was closed to all but male golfers.

Five years later, the USGA took over the sanction of the Women's Open, which Babe Zaharias would win three times. She brought to women's professional golf the showmanship it badly needed. Often she would play from the men's tees and score par or under. Featured in a cameo role in the movie "Pat and Mike," starring Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn, Zaharias was informed she was to lose to Hepburn in a golf scene. She curtly told the director, "No one beats the Babe!" The script was changed. And when once asked how she hit the ball so far, she replied, "Well, honey, I just loosen my girdle and swing away."

Through the decades, though, the image of a woman who could play golf par or under hasn't changed. The idea still lingers that any woman who can hit a long iron and stay with the shot through the line of flight isn't capable of baking a soufflé.

The Ladies' Professional Golf Assn.'s tour, unlike the Tournament Players' Division, isn't a showcase for its club professionals. Unlike the TPD, where the touring pro is the visible tip of a gigantic iceberg, the reverse is true for the LPGA tour. Those women, teaching, holding responsible positions as club professionals, selling merchandise and running their pro shops, are barely visible compared to their male counterparts.

There are exceptions. Mrs. Helen Gilligan Finn (she would rather be called Mrs. than Ms.) is the head professional at the Douglaston GC in New York City. She sells merchandise, rents carts, runs (with her husband's help) the operations of the pro shop, which she leases from the city, and gives lessons—an average of 12 a day during the warm months.

In New York City where the woman's liberation movement is so strong an influence that some giant corporations now have quotas for female executive positions, one would think that Mrs. Finn had carried the banner of women's rights to every pro shop in the New York metropolitan area.

"Equality, hell," she says, "I come in often at five o'clock in the morning on weekends in the summer and often don't leave until after eight o'clock at night. I'm sure most of the other pros with city courses put in the same hours. Sure I'd like to see more women in the pro shop. I think it

would be good for women golfers and men golfers."

Mrs. Finn never has marched in parades, never been to a rally supporting women's rights; she wears no buttons reading, "Women Now!" and if asked who Kate Millet was she'd probably inquire if she were on the staff of Wilson or Spalding. Mrs. Finn would much rather talk about Ben Hogan and how he contributed to the modern golf swing.



PHOTOS BY PER-OLOF ODMAN

"I wouldn't be a golf pro if it weren't for men. Everything I know about golf I know from men," she says. "Although I had become a member of the LPGA, I never seriously thought about being a head professional. Golf had always been a refreshing game to me. But when I and about several hundred other school teachers were let go, a pro I'd known told me there was an opening here at Douglaston and I should apply. I did. I mailed my application and then went for an interview. There were seven of us—six men and me. A man from the parks commission looked at us and then said, 'A woman, my God, are we going to be in trouble if we don't hire her. Women's Lib will be down on us.'"

After more than 80 years of municipal golf in New York City, of which there are 13 regulation courses operated by the Parks Commission that total more than 1,752 acres and get more than 750,000 rounds of play annually, this is the first time a woman

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Would-be male golfers show no more reticence in learning the rudiments of the game from Helen Finn than in buying the accouterments of the game from her.

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has become a head professional. "It was about time we had a woman teacher," said a spokesman for the department of parks, "and we felt Mrs. Finn filled our needs."

Douglaston GC once was a well-heeled private club in the Borough of Queens, which the city bought in 1962. The course measures 5,455 yards and plays to a par 67. Its average annual play is 55,000 rounds per year, and its approximate revenue is \$147,189. Green fees on all the city's courses are \$2 daily and \$4 weekends.

"Women's Lib did help," says Mrs. Finn, "but my credentials were equal to any of the men. And I knew I would be doing a man's job."

Mrs. Finn is quick to admit that there's an "unintentional discrimination" about hiring women in country clubs. She states two cases of teaching women pros, who were offered jobs; one was hired because no man would take the job; the other went to a nine-hole course that didn't even have a practice putting green or a pro shop.

"Who rules country clubs? Men," she says. "You think if there were 50 men and one woman applying for a position as head professional, all equally qualified, the men would go out of their way to give the job to a woman. Of course, not. That's what I call unintentional discrimination. The best advice I can give a woman who wants to teach is first get that LPGA card and then apply as an assistant."

Mrs. Finn doesn't look like the woman you'd expect to see applying for a job at a country club. At 54 years old, she's married, a mother of three, a grandmother of one. She has elfin features, wears little or no make-up, and when she smiles, which is often, there are those straight, white teeth, and lively blue eyes. Her gray hair is chopped short. Her five feet five inch height and 130 pounds, deceptively conceals a fierce competitiveness.

On the lesson tee she's wearing knit pants, a loose fitting blouse, no golf glove on her left hand, no wedding ring. She's telling a group of four women about the golf swing. The tone of her voice is strong and dominant, threatening punitive measures if they don't learn. "Remember, girls, keep that clubhead square to the line of flight. The swing has two parts—the take away. That's right, stretch back

and turn. Knuckles to the sky. Now step into the shot. Move that right leg. Attack the ball. Be aggressive."

Admitting that this is what she should've been all her life—a golf pro—her struggle hasn't been so much against discrimination against women, but against the traditional roles of men and women. As a child she was encouraged by her parents to play sports. At the age of 15, somewhat tomboyish, she became the first Women's Metropolitan Amateur Athletic Union Handball champion. In college she played basketball and tennis.

When she entered Hunter College in New York City, she answered the question of what she wanted to be by saying she wanted to play tennis. She graduated with a B.A. degree in political science, became a correction officer for the sheriff of New York City, attended two years of law school, got married and then taught kindergarten and fifth grade.

"I guess I was rebelling all these years against being a good athlete," she says ruefully. "Women have been looked upon as freaks if they're good in sports. I still play golf in the low 80s and high 70s, when I have a chance to play. The last time I played here at Douglaston was almost eight months ago."

Now in her third full year as head professional at Douglaston, she still is only an apprentice LPGA member and admits that the hardest part of becoming a member was finding out where the LPGA was and then finding the time to take the regional qualifying examination.

She took the teaching and written portion of the examination in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., under the direction of Naomi Venable. The teaching part was easy. Mrs. Finn had taught golf in physical education classes, in church groups and local department stores at night.

In 1971 she was invited to Pine Needles in Southern Pines, N.C., to participate in a seminar sponsored by the National Golf Foundation.

"You know there were about a 100 of us there. There were famous names in women's golf like Peggy Kirk Bell and Shirley Spork, and I was the only one who was a head professional. This summer I hope to go to a PGA seminar."

Mrs. Finn claims that much of her teaching techniques come from the lit-

erature published by the National Golf Foundation. Yet, like any teacher, she states she continually learns from her pupils. "I never hit a shot during a lesson," she says. "Why, to some of these girls just beginning, my little pop of 200 yards looks like a big boom by Nicklaus. I just try to please each person as they come along."

Perhaps the most satisfying aspect of her brief career as a head professional is the way men have responded. "I anticipated some male resistance; it would have been perfectly natural, but it never occurred. Why, I was set to hire a young man as an assistant who had lots of muscles to teach the men while I handled the women. But there never has been a problem. In the beginning I just let the men feel as threatened as they wanted about me. I wasn't worried; I've always been a very independent woman."

When asked what golfer in the world she would most like to play a round of golf with, Mrs. Finn smiles slightly and says, "My husband, of course." □

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MACDONALD ELECTED PRESIDENT OF NGF

CHICAGO—Paul R. MacDonald, vice president sales, Dunlop Tire and Rubber Corp. Sports Div., was elected president of the National Golf Foundation at that organization's annual spring meeting April 30 in Tarpon Springs, Fla.

He succeeds Robert D. Rickey, vice president of the MacGregor Corp., who steps down after eight years as NGF president. MacDonald's primary duties will be to administrate the foundation's national operations.

CASSINI TO DESIGN APPAREL LINE FOR MUNSINGWEAR

In a telephone conversation with GOLFDOM, Ken George, **Munsingwear's** vice president of marketing services confirmed the current industry rumor: Oleg Cassini will be designing golf and tennis apparel for a new division of Munsingwear. This division will carry a complete line of better goods for men and women. George hinted that some exciting new fashion ideas will be coming out soon under the Cassini label.