

CREATING A CHALLENGE FOR WOMEN GOLFERS

By BETSY RAWLS
PGA Hall of Fame / Tournament Director



About the Author:

Residence: Spartanburg, South Carolina

Became Professional: 1951

Career Earnings: \$302,664

Tour Victories: (55) Includes two LPGA Championships and four U.S. Opens.

Professional Career: Betsy had her best of many extraordinary seasons in 1959 when she won ten tournaments, the Vare Trophy and almost \$27,000, an enormous sum in those days. She was elected to the LPGA Hall of Fame the following year. She ranks third behind Mickey Wright and Kathy Whitworth in career victories with 55, among them the LPGA Championship in 1959 and 1969. Betsy also won

the U.S. Open four times, including her rookie year. She was twice a leading money winner and in 1953 was named Golfer-of-the-Year by the LA Times. Always a champion both on and off the course, Betsy retired from competitive golf in 1975 and in July of that year became the LPGA Tournament Director.

Personal: Took up golf at age 17 while in high school in Arlington, Tex. . . . Graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Texas with a degree in math and physics . . . Was known as one of the game's greatest shotmakers and a wizard around the greens . . . In the early years of the LPGA she served as president of the LPGA Tournament Operations committee because of her knowledge of golf and its rules.

The LPGA tournament officials have a basic philosophy for women's championship golf. The aim in setting up golf courses is to provide for players a course that is challenging, interesting, and enjoyable. We want a course that will reward good shots and penalize bad ones. Low scores should be possible but should be the result of good shot making. A good course should test every facet of a person's game and character. It should test shot making skill with all clubs, as well as a player's awareness, imagination, intelligence, and emotional control. Our objectives are to reward excellence, promote improvement in the quality of golf that is played on our tour, and to encourage dedication and hard work. The following are some things that we consider in trying to provide a difficult but fair test for golfers.

First of all, we have to know the capabilities of our golfers, and especially in relation to the capabilities of men golfers, because most of the courses are designed and prepared for men players. Secondly, we have to have an understanding of the design of the course and what challenges the architect expected each hole to offer. It is important, also, to be able to adapt the set up of each hole to the existing conditions of the course.

Our testing has shown that the average length off the tee for a woman professional is about 220 yards, with 195 yards being carry and 35 yards being roll. I think it is worthy to note that in order to assure a roll of around 35 yards the fairways must be fairly dry. Men professionals get a larger percentage of distance off the tee from carry, therefore dryer fairways are not as important to them. In fact, soft fairways are preferable in a man's tournament because most courses are too short for such power hitters, anyway.

You can imagine who this relates to your ladies' day play, although I'm not suggesting bringing on a rash of wrist injuries from table top conditions.

For your information, the longest drivers on our tour carry the ball around 230 yards. Naturally this is with a higher trajectory and will produce less roll. On average fairways the end result will be drives of 250 to 255 yards!

The average woman professional hits a 5 iron around 155-160 yards and with that club will hit the green over 75% of the time. She will get within 30 feet of the hole 60% of the time and within 15 feet about 27% of the time. Incidentally, women professionals are very accurate drivers. 70% of their tee shots will land within 30 yard wide fairways.

Another factor to consider is how much height and back spin does the average women player get with each club. This determines how much roll we allow for when setting a pin. On a well conditioned green, with little or no slope to contend with, we would allow around 24 feet for a 5 iron to stop. I would guess the men pros could easily play to a cup within 18 feet of the front edge. Now, do you expect too much of your women members?

When appraising the course we have to consider what the architect wanted to require of a player and if that challenge is also presented to a woman golfer. I think it is safe to say that courses that are designed to reward accuracy rather than length have been more suitable for women's championship golf.

We have often recommended the building of new tees. For

instance some of the larger greens have added so much distance to the hole that pin placements in the backs of greens over bunkers have not been able to be used. Shorter tees have been requested for the following year to bring the pins into play. We make certain, however, that it would not make the tee shot less demanding.

When fairway bunkers are out of reach in the tee shot landing area, we may cut a new tee up in the fairway on a carefully picked level area.

If there is a hazard out of play, and by re-contouring the fairway we can bring it into play, we often do, providing it does not eliminate the challenge of the next shot.

On the whole, we need dryer fairways than the men professionals do to bring the landing area challenges into play, and softer greens to allow for the use of tighter pins. This also gives the staff greater flexibility in setting up more challenging holes.

The types of grasses that are in the fairways and rough certainly affect our thinking in preparing a course for a tournament. Fairways that can be cut to a 1/2 inch are much easier for women to play from than fairways, such as bluegrass, that cannot be cut as short. It is very difficult for women to put enough spin on the ball if any grass at all is between the face of the club and the ball at impact. Certain teeing areas and pin positions are automatically eliminated from consideration if the fairway grass is cut higher than 1/2 inch.

We would never ask a player to play a shot with a two iron from a bluegrass fairway over a bunker to a shallow green, though we might ask her to do this from a bermuda grass fairway.

As a player, what I appreciated the most was an official who was able to demand the most from me as a shot maker without being unfair. To discern this is much harder in women's golf than men's because of the strength factor. You gentlemen who set up the course for women on ladies day have an unbelievable challenge because of the wide variety in strength and skill of your women members. The more knowledgeable players will appreciate your ability, however, and the others will appreciate you and not know why. Of course those golfers that have a good day will always love you, and those ones that have a bad day, well, they'll get you next time.

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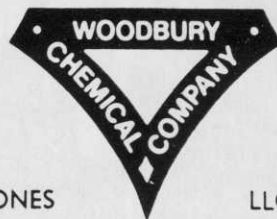
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