

Bridgewater State University

Maxwell Library
Archives & Special Collections

Babe Didrikson Zaharias Collection, 1931-1956
(Part of the Kathleen Bertrand and Linda Lundin,
Honoring Women in Sports Collection)
(MSS-049.10)

Finding Aid Compiled by
Elizabeth Ezekiel, 2022



Last updated: October 20, 2022

Maxwell Library
Bridgewater State University / 10 Shaw Road / Bridgewater MA 02325
archives@bridgew.edu / 508-531-1389

Volume: .5 linear feet (1 document box, 1 artifact box)

Acquisition: All items in this manuscript group were donated to Bridgewater State University by Kathleen and Linda Lundin in 2021 and 2022.

Access: Access to this record group is unrestricted.

Copyright: The researcher assumes full responsibility for conforming with the laws of copyright. Whenever possible, the Maxwell Library will provide information about copyright owners and other restrictions, but the legal determination ultimately rests with the researcher. Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be discussed with the University Archivist.

Babe Didrikson Zaharias Biographical Sketch

Mildred Ella “Babe” Didrikson Zaharias (1911-1956) was one of the most accomplished women athletes of the twentieth century. She grew up in Port Arthur and Beaumont, Texas; her parents were immigrants from Norway. She excelled in baseball, golf, and track and field, but also took up basketball, tennis, swimming, diving, boxing, volleyball, handball, bowling, skating, cycling, and even billiards. This wide breadth of sports demonstrates her excellence as an overall athlete. She began her youth sports career playing baseball in Texas. As an adult, Didrikson pitched in Major League Baseball spring training and exhibition games, even pitching a no-hitter against a men’s team. In honor of Babe Ruth, she earned the nickname “Babe” due to her frequent home runs.

From 1929-1932, Didrikson played on the Golden Cyclones basketball team in Dallas, Texas. From 1930-1932, Didrikson was a member of the women’s All-American Basketball Team. During those same two years, she won eight events and tied in ninth place in a national competition for track and field. In the 1932 Women’s Amateur Athletic Association (WAAA), an annual track and field competition held in England, Didrikson competed as a one-woman team and won six individual events and the team title. The runner-up to Didrikson was a 20-person team, a full eight points behind Didrikson. Her success at the WAAA qualified her to compete at the trials for the 1932 Summer Olympic Games held in Los Angeles. During these Games, women were only allowed to participate in three events, although during the qualifying trials Didrikson made the cut in five events. Didrikson won a gold medal in javelin for a world-record throw of 143 feet. She earned another gold medal in the 80-meter hurdle with a world record time of 11.7 seconds. In the high-jump event, Didrikson took home silver with a jump height of 5’5”. Although Didrikson tied for first place in high-jump, she was awarded silver on a ruling that claimed her unorthodox jumping style was prohibited at the games.

In the wake of her great winnings in 1932, Didrikson received national attention from the press. Much of the news about Didrikson was sexist, accusing her of representing the antithesis of

femininity. Sports writer Joe Williams, for the *New York World Telegram*, wrote that “it would be much better if she and her ilk stayed at home, got themselves prettied up and waited for the phone to ring.” There were even outlandish claims that she might actually be a man. In recent years, posthumous coverage of Didrikson in major sports networks still subjects her to derogatory language, calling her a “prima donna” and “flamboyant.”

Following her career in track and field, Didrikson shifted her focus to golf. She began playing in 1933, initially facing discrimination on the basis of her gender. In 1938, she competed at the Los Angeles open. Here, she met George Zaharias, a wrestler and part-time actor from Colorado. They married that same year in December 1938, and Zaharias became Didrikson’s manager. That same year, Didrikson became the first woman to compete in a men’s golf event, although she did not make it into the competitive rounds. She won 10 majors, including the women’s US Open in 1948, 1950 and 1954. She even completed a Grand Slam of the women’s majors in 1950. Throughout her golf career, Didrikson won a total of 82 tournaments. Despite her immense success, she felt frustrated by the limited opportunities available for women golfers. To help remedy this, she co-founded the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) with golfer Patty Berg in 1949.

Didrikson was named Women Athlete of the Year six times by the Associated Press, along with World’s Greatest Woman Athlete of the First Half of the 20th Century. *Sports Illustrated* also awarded her the title Woman Athlete of the 20th Century. At the end of her career, she was earning \$100,000 annually from tournament winnings and brand endorsements, equivalent of one million dollars today. In the 2020 *Times Magazine* “100 Women of the Year” series, Didrikson was on the cover representing the year 1932. She was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in January 2021.

Didrikson was diagnosed with colon cancer in 1953, shortly after winning the Babe Zaharias Open in her hometown of Beaumont, Texas. In one of the greatest comebacks in sports history, she proceeded to win the US Open in 1954 while wearing a colostomy bag. She won four other tournaments in 1954, and two more final victories in 1955 to close her career. Didrikson died from the cancer in 1956 at the age of 45.

Babe Didrikson Zaharias

Scope and Content Note

The Babe Didrikson Zaharias collection is part of the larger *Kathleen Bertrand and Linda Lundin, Honoring Women in Sports Collection*.

This collection contains two boxes of materials. Box one contains 21 photographs of Didrikson Zaharias and one newspaper advertisement. Box two contains an original baseball of the touring House of David Team from 1934, a barnstorming baseball team. The ball contains team member signatures, including a “Babe Didrikson” signature in bold letters.

Related collections include: the many sub-collections within the *Kathleen Bertrand and Linda Lundin, Honoring Women in Sports Collection*.

Babe Didrikson Zaharias

Box and Folder List

Box 1

Folder

1. Didrikson in printer’s stance, 1931
2. Babe Didrikson, broad jump, 1931
3. “Sets World Mark in 80-Meter Hurdles,” Didrikson jumping a hurdle, July 25, 1931
4. Babe Didrikson at finish line of 80-meter hurdles at Olympics, 1932
5. Didrikson winning the 80-mter hurdles at Olympics, 1932
6. Babe Didrikson holding a javelin at Olympics, 1932
7. “The Babe Warms Up,” throwing a javelin, 1932
8. Stella Walsh and Babe Didrikson, 1932
9. Didrikson shooting a rifle, 1933
10. “Wonder Girl of the Olympics,” Didrikson in mid-golf swing, November 24, 1934
11. “Women Golfers Aid Flood Sufferers,” Helen Hicks, Babe Didrikson, Patty Berg, and Jean Bauer, February 7, 1937
12. “Babe Didrikson Wins Woman’s Wester,” Babe Didrikson Zaharias and Dorothy Germain, June 23, 1945
13. “The Pants and Swing that Helped Babe Win,” Babe Didrikson Zaharias, 1947
14. “Babe Brings British Golf Cup to US,” Didrikson Zaharias clutching trophy, June 30, 1947
15. Didrikson Zaharias holding trophy and check for first place at Women’s National Open, 1948
16. “A Practice Shot for Babe,” Didrikson Zaharias, 1952
17. “The Babe in Action,” Didrikson Zaharias, 1953
18. “Smack of Congratulations,” Babe Didrikson Zaharias with husband and Betty Dodd, reproduction, March 13, 1954
19. “Smile of a Champion,” Didrikson Zaharias, 1954
20. The Babe Comes Home Again,” Didrikson Zaharias, 1955

21. "Birthday Party," Didrikson Zaharias, 1956

22. Quaker Oats newspaper ad, undated

Box 2

- Original baseball for the touring House of David Team, signed by team players including Babe Didrikson, 1934