

The Golf Chronicles

The story of golf at Reading Country Club and in Berks County

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1937-39



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Betty Fehl, right, bidding for her second Pennsylvania State Women's Amateur golf championship, is shown with Mrs. Arthur Willke, Jr., her rival in the second round today at Reading Country Club. The two chatted with Henry Clay Poe, Reading Country Club pro, before the start of the match. Miss Fehl won on the 20th hole in the overtime match.
—Reading Eagle, June 26, 1956

Signs of the Times

Many of the 98 entrants in the 1956 Pennsylvania Women's Amateur golf championship were married. In the *Reading Eagle*, the married players were referred to by their formal married name. For example, Mrs. J. Albert Hayes or Mrs. F.G. Weir. In most instances, their first names were not reported by the newspaper.

The single women's first names were used on first reference: Miss Evelyn South.

On second reference, the players were referred to as Mrs. Hayes or Miss South.

And that's the way it was in 1956.

The Keystone Connections to the Women's Open

Pennsylvania is a popular venue for the U.S. Women's Open golf championship. This week's 70th renewal will be contested at Lancaster Country Club, the ninth Open played at a Pennsylvania golf course. No other state has hosted more.

Here are the Keystone State sites and the champions.

1952	Bala Country Club, Philadelphia	Louise Suggs, +8
1959	Churchill Valley Country Club, Pittsburgh	Mickey Wright, -1
1968	Moselem Springs Golf Club, Fleetwood	Susie Berning, +5
1971	Kahkwa Club, Erie	JoAnne Carner, E
1976	Rolling Green Country Club, Springfield	JoAnne Carner, +8
1992	Oakmont Country Club, Oakmont	Patty Sheehan, E
2009	Saucon Valley Country Club, Bethlehem	Eun-Hee Ji, E
2010	Oakmont Country Club, Oakmont	Paula Creamer, -3
2015	Lancaster Country Club, Lancaster	

The RCC connection. As with most golf stories, we can find a connection between Reading Country Club and the Women's Open. The connection is Betsy King, of course. The Berks County native and Exeter High School graduate, who learned the game at RCC, is a two-time Open champion. She won in 1989 at Indianwood Country Club, Lake Orion, Mich., at -2 and did the repeat in 1990, shooting -4 at Atlanta Athletic Club.

State Am. Although RCC never hosted a tournament for women professionals, the golf course was the site of the 1956 Pennsylvania Women's Amateur Championship. RCC member Betty Fehl was the people's choice to win her second state title. She also won in 1950 at Berkshire CC. There is also a Fehl-King connection. More on that later.

Play began with a qualifying round on Monday, June 25. The 98 entrants were slotted into five flights based on their scores, with the top 32 players in the Championship flight.

Long-hitting Maureen Riley, New Castle, won medalist honors with an even-par 74. Her round featured a three-under-par 32 on the front nine, with birdies on holes 1, 3, 5 and 8 and a bogey on 6. Miss Fehl qualified with a 77. Two other past champions were in the field. Mrs. Mary Capers, Merion CC, the 1954 champion, qualified with an 83 and Mrs. Annette Gessler, Whitemarsh CC, winner in '51 and '53, shot 77.

Razor's edge. After a first-round 7 and 5 win against Mrs. Leo Caruthers, Coatesville CC, Miss Fehl was on a razor's edge in her next two matches. She advanced to the semi-final round by defeating Mrs. Arthur Wilkie, Cedarbrook CC, in 20 holes, overcoming a 3-down deficit after five holes. She then won against Alice Gray, Merion CC, in a 19-hole match. Miss Fehl held a 1-up lead through 10. Miss Gray tied the match on the 11th then took the lead on the 12th. Miss Fehl evened the match on 15 but lost 16 to go one down with two to play. Miss Fehl won 17 to square the match. The players halved 18, setting the stage for Miss Fehl to win with a par on the first extra hole.

The 18-hole semi-final matches were set. Miss Fehl, the home course favorite, would take on the medalist, Miss Riley. Mrs. Capers, a past champion who won her quarter-final match 6 and 4, would square off against Mrs. Dyson, who won her previous match by 5 and 4.



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Kiss for the winner—Mrs. John Dyson, of Hazleton, gets a kiss from her husband after she won the Pennsylvania State Women's Amateur Golf Championship yesterday by defeating Maureen Riley, of New Castle, 1-up in the 36-hole final.



Maureen blasts out—Maureen Riley, of New Castle, blasts out of a sand trap on the 33rd hole of the Pennsylvania State Women's Amateur Golf Championship finals at the Reading Country Club. Miss Riley lost a 1-up decision to Mrs. John Dyson, of Hazleton.

Editor's note: the 33rd hole was the 15th on the routing played at RCC in 1956. It is today's 13th hole.

Photos are from the Reading Eagle, July 1, 1956.

Fehl falters. The semi-final matches were each decided by resounding 5 and 4 victories for Miss Riley over Miss Fehl and Mrs. Dyson over Mrs. Capers. Miss Fehl succumbed early to Miss Riley's withering four birdie, two-under 33 front-nine onslaught to trail 4-down at the turn. She could not conjure the come-back magic shown of her previous matches and was closed out on the 14th hole. Miss Riley's card sported six birdies, five pars and three bogeys for a three-under par 55 over the 14 holes. In the other match, Mrs. Dyson took a 3-up advantage to the back nine. By the time the match ended on the 14th hole, she had overwhelmed Mrs. Capers with birdies on 4, 7 and 13.

The final match, played on Friday, June 29, was contested over 36 holes. Miss Riley and Mrs. Dyson played like champions, taking the match to its full length. The 37-year-old Mrs. Dyson, from Hazleton, took the measure of her 22-year-old opponent, sinking a winning 6-foot putt on the 36th hole. But before hoisting the trophy, she had to watch Miss Riley attempt a 4-footer that would have continued the match. Riley missed. Dyson won. She made only two birdies to Miss Riley's six. But the latter frequently found trouble, making costly mistakes. Mrs. Dyson's consistent play was rewarded.

Short misses. As dramatic as the final hole was, the real excitement played out on holes 29 through 35. With eight holes remaining, Mrs. Dyson lead 3 up. With a birdie and a par, Miss Riley closed the gap to trail by 1 with six holes to go. Miss Riley's wild tee shot cost her the 32nd hole and she had to scramble to halve the 33rd.

Mrs. Dyson lead 3-up with two to play. But she chipped poorly on the 34th hole and lost to Miss Riley's par 5. Miss Riley hit her tee shot to 10 feet on the 35th hole while Mrs. Dyson was in the fringe left of the green. She sculled her chip shot. As it raced across the green, she yelled, "Hit the pin!" It did and the ball stopped a foot from the hole. Miss Riley two-putted for a par 3. Inexplicably, her opponent missed her 12-inch par putt. The match was square going to the last, where Mrs. Dyson's 6-footer sealed the deal.

End of story? Not quite.

Examine the play over the last three holes. Miss Riley won the 35th hole—the 16th hole on the golf course—with a par 5. She won the 35th/17th with a par 3. Mrs. Dyson won the championship with a par 4 on the 36th hole, the 18th at RCC. The *Reading Eagle* did not print a final-match score card, but the course clearly conclude with the current number 16 as the finishing hole, number 15 as the 17th and number 14 as the 16th.

Mrs. Dyson would win the championship again in 1962, while Miss Fehl won her second title in 1965. Maureen Riley never made it back to the final match.

Berks' most dominant golfer. Here's the promised Fehl-King connection. Both players learned the game as youngsters at RCC. Miss Fehl, who became Betty Fehl-Fegley when she married Howard Fegley in 1979, dominated amateur golf in Berks County like no other player. She won the Berks Women's amateur championship an astounding 33 times, including a run of 20 consecutive titles beginning in 1953. She did not defend in 1974 but won again in 1975. In 1976, the generations crossed paths when 21-year-old Betsy King won the title against Mrs. Fehl-Fegley in 20 holes.

Mrs. Fehl-Fegley won her 33rd and final Berks Amateur championship in 1981, 45 years after capturing her first title as a 13-year-old in 1936. Mrs. Fehl-Fegley died on April 8, 1986, at age 63.

Now, that's the end of the story.