



Hall of Famers, et alia

The Women's Eastern Open was played nine times over a period of thirteen years, including a four-year run at Berkshire Country Club. Except for the first playing in 1949, which was sanctioned by the Women's Professional Golfers Association, the tournament was a Ladies Professional Golf Association event.

- 1949** Essex Fells Country Club, Essex Fells, NJ
Babe Zaharias*, 219, even par, \$1,000
Purse: \$3,500
- 1950** Woodland Golf Club, Newton, MA
Patty Berg*, 217, +4 \$750
Purse: \$3,000
- 1951** Berkshire Country Club, Reading, PA
Beverly Hansen, 215, -1, \$1000
Purse: \$3,500
- 1952** Berkshire Country Club
Betsy Rawls*, 226, +10, \$875
Purse: \$3,500
- 1953** Berkshire country Club
Betsy Rawls, 293, +5, \$1,250
Won playoff against **Patty Berg**
Purse: \$5,000
- 1955** Berkshire Country Club
Louise Suggs*, 291, +7, \$1,000
Purse: \$5,000
- 1960** Range End Country Club, Dillsburg,, PA
Mickey Wright*, 213, -3, \$1,247
Purse: \$7,500
- 1961** Range End Country Club
Mary Lena Faulk, 213, -3, \$1,247
Purse: \$7,500
- 1962** Pleasant Valley Country Club, Sutton, MA
Shirley Englehorn, 226, +4, \$1,450
Purse: \$10,000

* Member of the World Golf Hall of Fame



Betsy Rawls, left, and Patty Berg met in a playoff for the 1953 Eastern Open title.

There was Something in the Berkshire Air

The headline in the Sports section of the *Reading Eagle*, May 31, 1953, was **Patty Berg's** entry in the Women's Eastern Open championship. The tournament was scheduled for Berkshire Country Club, beginning June 4. Patty finished tied third in 1951 and solo third in '52. She won the title in 1950. The article lauded Miss Berg for her efforts to popularize the game though hundreds of free clinics at tournaments across the country.

The big change in the 1953 tournament was an expansion to 72 holes from 54 played the previous two years. The purse increased from \$3,500 to \$5,000.

Other competitors included **Betsy Rawls**, the defending champion, and **Beverly Hansen**, the 1951 winner.

Louise Suggs was among the favorites, coming on the heels of her win the previous week in the final leg of the Weathervane 144-Hole Cross Country Classis at Whitmarsh Valley Country Club. Other players expected at Berkshire included the **Bauer** sisters, Marlene and Alice, **Marilyn Smith** and **Peggy Kirk**. Berks golf fans would also get their first look at **Jackie Pung**, the 1952 United States Women's Amateur Champion. The amateur field was expected to include **Betty Fehl** of Reading Country Club.

Betsy Rawls got off to a strong start in her title defense, posting a course-record 68, four under par, in Thursday's first round. Miss Rawls was at her best on the front nine, which she scorched in 31 strokes, five under par. She made five of her seven birdies on the front. A pair of Texans, **Betty Jameson** and **Betty MacKinnon**, shared second with 72s.

Jackie Pung posted 73, while Louise Suggs was at 76. Patty Berg was at 77 with Peggy Kirk and amateur Betty Fehl of Reading Country Club. Reading amateur **Ellen Gery**, Berkshire Country Club, was at 78.

Miss Rawls continued her assault on par with a second-round 71, the best round of the day. She had a commanding nine-stroke lead over Beverley Hanson with two 74s. Misses Fehl and Gery led the amateurs, both with 159 totals.

The third round scores reflected changed course conditions. The tees were moved back and the holes were cut in more difficult positions.

Despite soaring to a 77. Miss Rawls walked off the final green with an eight stroke lead. Betty MacKinnon came home in 35, one under par, to post the day's best round, 73, moving her into a tie for second with Patty Berg, who shot 74.

Betty Fehl lead the amateurs at 241 despite a third-round 82. Ellen Gery struggled with an 87 for a 246 total.

The Golf Chronicles

Golf Stories from the Pennsylvania Heartland

Byron Nelson
Reading CC Pro
1937-39



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Cross-Country Golf

The 144-Hole Weathervane Cross Country was on the LPGA Tour from 1950 to 1953. The tournament consisted of four 36-hole legs played over several weeks. Each leg was also an official LPGA event.

The tournament was sponsored by **Alvin Handmacher**, who established the Weathervane brand of women's skirt suits that were popular in the 1940s and '50s.

The 1953 Weathervane

- February 14 and 15 at the Boca Raton Hotel and Club, Boca Raton, Fla., won by **Beverly Hanson**.
- April 11 and 12, Arizona Country Club, Phoenix, Ariz., a tie between **Patty Berg** and **Louise Suggs**.
- May 2 and 3, Presidio Club, San Francisco, won by Miss Suggs.
- May 30 and 31, Whitemarsh Valley Country Club, Lafayette Hills, Pa., also won by Miss Suggs with a score of 146. She took home \$750 from the \$3,000 purse. Miss Suggs collected \$7,445 from the Weathervane, including \$5,000 for winning the overall title.

Final 1953 Weathervane Standings

Louise Suggs	593
Patty Berg	604
Betsy Rawls	617
Marilynn Smith	627
Alice Bauer	631
Betty Jameson	635
Jackie Pung	636
Betty MacKinnon	638
Marlene Bauer	649
Peggy Kirk	657

The previous Weathervane champions were **Babe Zaharias**, 1950; **Patty Berg**, 1951; and **Betsy Rawls**, 1952.

What promised to be an easy wire-to-wire victory for Betsy Rawls turned into a nail-biter. The fans at Berkshire Country Club who braved the rainy weather witnessed one of the greatest come-backs in golf history. Patty Berg fashioned a sizzling three-under-par 69, making up eight strokes on Miss Rawls, who posted a second consecutive 77.

Although she was playing poorly, Miss Rawls held a four-stroke lead on the 17th tee. But the tenacious Miss Berg was far from conceding. Playing in a driving rain, Patty rattled home a birdie 4 to her rival's bogey 6, narrowing the gap to two. Miss Rawls wedged her second shot to the 18th green, landing some 30 feet from the hole. Miss Berg thrilled the gallery by nearly holing her second, the ball stopping mere inches from the jar. Miss Rawls three-putted, Patty tapped in for a birdie and, after a 20-minute break, back they went to the 18th tee for a sudden-death playoff.

After squandering a four-shot lead on the final two holes, Miss Rawls confidence had to be shattered. She gathered her strength and matched Miss Berg, splitting the fairway off the tee. Miss Rawls wedged her ball to 18 feet, while Miss Berg was 30 feet away. Both putted strongly past the hole by six feet. After measuring, Betsy was determined to be away. Through the raindrops, she calmly dropped her putt for a par 4. Patty's putt sailed wide by inches and with that, Betsy Rawls defended her Women's Eastern Open championship, taking home \$1,250. Miss Berg won \$900.

1953 Professional Results

Betsy Rawls	293	\$1,250
Patty Berg	293	900
Betty Jameson	299	300
Beverly Hanson	299	300
Alice Bauer	302	250
Betty Hicks	303	200
Betty Mackinnon	303	200
Louise Suggs	305	175
Jackie Pung	306	150
Peggy Kirk	308	125
Marilyn Smith	315	50
Marlene Bauer	315	50

For reasons not found, the tournament was not played in 1954. In January 1955, Stanley Ross, chairman of Berkshire's activities committee, announced that Berkshire would once again host the tournament in June with a \$5,000 purse.

The event suffered a setback when **Patty Berg**, a fan favorite for her golf skill and good-natured banter with the spectators, announced that she would not play in Reading. Miss Berg was named to replace **Babe Zaharias** in the annual National Golf Day at the Olympic Club in San Francisco, June 4. The Babe suffered back and leg injuries and was forced to withdraw. She would die a year later from cancer.

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National Golf Day featured Miss Berg and **Ed Furgol**, the U.S. Open champion, playing 18 holes, with players across the country trying to beat the pros' scores. The golfers each paid \$1 to enter, with the proceeds donated to charities. Furgol shot 72, two over par, and Miss Berg posted 77, one over the women's par. She gave the fans a thrill on the 13th hole when her tee shot hit the flag stick and stopped an inch from a hole-in-one.

The Women's Eastern Open, played at 72 holes, opened on June 2. **Fay Crocker**, a native of Montevideo, Uruguay, going for her second consecutive win, led after the first round with a two-under-par 69. Her card included 16 pars and two birdies. She credited strong iron play, hitting 15 of 18 greens. **Marilyn Smith**, who missed a three-foot putt on the last, was in at even par 71.

Mickey Wright had the shot of the day when she aced the par 3 16th hole on her way to 76. The game's capricious nature was on full display as Miss Wright's playing partner, Mary Lena Faulk, made an eight on the same hole and finished with 83. Miss Wright was in the first year of what would become a hall-of-fame career. She is second all-time in LPGA wins with 82, trailing only Kathy Whitworth's 88. Miss Wright won 13 major championships. With four wins, she and Betsy Rawls captured the most U.S. Women's open titles.

Reading's Ellen Gery led the amateurs with 80. Betty Fehl was a stroke back.

With an even-par 71, Miss Crocker built a five-stroke lead after two rounds with a 140 total. Louise Suggs took second place with the day's only other even-par round. Betsy Rawls, the two-time defending champion, was fourth at 150.

Ellen Gery continued to lead the amateurs with her second consecutive 80.

Miss Crocker slumped a bit in round three with a 75 for a 215 total. That was good enough for a seven stroke lead with one round to play. Louise Suggs' 77 left her in second at 222.

There must have been something in the Berkshire air in the mid 1950s. Betsy Rawls led the Women's Eastern Open tournament by eight strokes after three rounds in 1953. She led by four with two holes to play. But relentless Patty Berg erased the deficit to force a playoff that Miss Rawls won for her second consecutive title.

Two years later, Fay Crocker took a seven-shot lead to the final round. So, what happened?

Louise Suggs, saying she was "as surprised as anyone", finished with a two-under 69 to edge Miss Crocker by one to take the title and the lionesses' share of the \$5,000 purse. Miss Suggs posted seven birdies, none more important than the 12-foot putt she rolled in on the final green.

Miss Crocker had a putt on the last to tie, but the narrow miss relegated her to second. The crisp iron play she exhibited during the first three rounds deserted her on championship Sunday. Her bold play was not rewarded as she often put herself in difficulty and could not recover.

Ellen Gery finished with 74 to take low amateur honors at 320. Anne Rutherford, Carlisle, was second at 326, followed by Betty Fehl, 332.

The 1955 tournament marked the last playing of the Women's Eastern Open at Berkshire. Paul Lukas, writing in the *Reading Eagle*, February 2, 1956, reported that the event was not on the LPGA's 1956 schedule. The tournament was renewed in 1960, '61 and '62.

1955 Professional Results

Louise Suggs	291	\$1,000
Fay Crocker	292	700
Beverly Hanson	299	600
Betty Jameson	300	500
Betty Hicks	301	387
Vonnie Colby	301	387
Alice Hagge	302	280
Gloria Armstrong	302	280
Betsy Rawls	303	220
Mickey Wright	307	175
Marilyn Smith	308	82
Betty MacKinnon	308	82
Joyce Ziske	308	82
Bonnie Randolph	308	82
Pat O'Sullivan	308	82
Carol Bowman	308	82
Marlene Bauer	209	82
Peggy Kirk	310	82
Mary Lena Faulk	315	82