

The Golf Chronicles

Golf Stories from the Pennsylvania Heartland

Byron Nelson
Reading CC Pro
1937-39



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Three Unbeatables

Some records will stand forever. Such as... In 1974, **JoAnn Williams**, an Exeter High School senior, established three golf unbeatables.

She won the first Berks high school girls championship, the first PIAA Distinct 3 girls championship and, for good measure, the first PIAA state high school girls championship.

She snared the first county crown, shooting 42-44—86 at Flying Hills Golf Club to edge **Shelly Buchman**, Fleetwood, who shot 41-46—87. Wilson High's **Terry Leinbach** was third at 92.

Joann took the first District 3 title, posting 80 at the Hershey Spring Creek golf course. Buchman, 89, and Leinbach, 92, were again second and third.

Williams completed the sweep, winning the first state girls championship with a come-back victory over **Susan Ramonat**, Freedom High. An opening 91 on the Penn State White Course left her three behind **Meredith Marshall**, Lower Merion. A second-round 91 gave her a 182 and the Pennsylvania title.

JoAnn was also a stalwart on Exeter's girls tennis team. Exeter did not have a girls golf team and back then girls could not play on boys teams.

If the name JoAnn Williams is not familiar, how about **JoAnn Heller**? JoAnn married **Mike Heller**, a fair golfer in his own right.

JoAnn was associated with Golden Oaks and Blackwood golf courses and was tournament director for the Betsy King Golf Classic, an LPGA tournament played at Berkleigh from 1996 to 2004.

She won the RCC women's championship eight times. Mike is a four-time RCC champion.



Betty Fehl on the lesson tee at RCC with Byron Nelson.

When Betsy Met Betty

The evidence says the three best women golfers in Berks history are **Betsy King**, **Betty Fehl-Fegley** and **Edith Quier**.

Betsy, a member of the World Golf Hall of Fame, won 39 professional tournaments, including six majors. She graduated from Exeter High School in 1973.

Betty was the queen of Berks golf, winning the county amateur championship an astonishing 33 times between 1936 and 1981. She was also a multiple RCC women's club champion.

Edith was much more than Hawley's sister. She played a national amateur schedule in the 1920's and '30s at a time when there was no women's professional golf. Edith was among the world's best, playing against the era's and the game's legends, including **Glenna Collet Vare**, **Maureen Orcutt** and **Dorothy Campbell Hurd**. Although these names may not echo through the ages, the name Vare should be familiar to golfers. The Vare Trophy, named in her honor, is awarded to the LPGA player with the year's lowest scoring average. Betsy King won the Vare in 1987 and 1993.

Edith won the first of her five ladies titles at Berkshire C. C. in 1918. She collected three Pennsylvania amateur titles (1933, '34, '36) and three Philadelphia amateur championships (1936, '39, '47). Her most successful year was 1936, when she won 11 consecutive events, including the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Eastern U.S. amateur crowns.

Both King and Fehl started golf at RCC. Edith was a Berkshire member and at times as a member at Merion, Huntingdon Valley and Moselem Springs.

Betty had started playing golf when her mother scheduled a lesson with RCC's head professional, **Byron Nelson**. Betty so impressed Lord Byron that he wrote about her on page 77 of his book, *How I Played the Game*. So what if he misspelled her last name. The memory it is that counts.

Betsy, too, got her start at RCC, taking lessons from Henry Poe.

The generations met in the mid- 1970s when the duo played four times. Their most notable match was at Heidelberg in the 1975 Women's Berks County amateur championship. Betsy was the two-time defending state junior amateur champion. Betty was undefeated in Berks competition. In the previous 32 years, she played 30 times and won all 30.

King an Ace. Betty advanced to the semi-final round by defeating **Bonnie Shuman**, 5 and 4. Betsy rode a hole-in-one on the 121-yard 13th to defeat **Dot Woodling**, 6 and 5. The other semi-finalists were **JoAnne Matz**, a 7 and 6 winner

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over **Wilma Holland**, and **Mary Ellen Remley**, who ousted **Carolyn Hatt**, 4 and 2.

The Fehl-King dream match was set up when Betty defeated Matz, 7 and 6, and Betsy eliminated Remley, the runner-up in 1974, 4 and 2. Betsy topped Betty in their three previous meetings. King defeated Fehl in the 1974 Central Pennsylvania championship and they split a pair of matches for the Heidelberg club championship.

Their games were as different as their ages. At 53, Fehl relied on a deadly short game to overcome her lack of length off the tee. The 19-year-old King, about to enter her junior year at Furman University, had the length to reach all the par 4 holes in two shots. Length was all-important because the course was soaked by rain. The balls were not rolling out.

Betty leads early. The wily veteran took a 3-up lead after nine holes, carding an even par 34 with a birdie on number 4 and a bogey on the seventh. Betsy was two down after four holes but then she dropped a 50-foot putt on the fifth hole for a birdie to draw within one. But she retreated to three down with misses from six and three feet on 6 and 8, respectively, giving Fehl wins with pars. King shot 37 on the front side.

Betsy played to her length advantage on the back nine. She won the 10th and 14th with three-foot putts. Fehl took four shots to reach the carpet on 386-yard 10th and three to get home on the 348-yard 14th. Betty shockingly shanked her approach shot to the 16th green and made a double bogey. Betsy evened the match with a bogey 5.

"I haven't done that in a long time," said Betty about that shot. "I had a feeling about it. I should have walked away but I don't do that."

The duo strode to the final tee tied. Betsy held the advantage on the 494-yard par 5 because of her length. King skied her second shot and hit her third into a trap. Betty was also short of the green in three. Fehl was first in, canning an 11-footer for bogey 6. Betsy stroked a seven-footer into the cup for the tying bogey.

Playoff bound. Back to the first tee they went.

"I never play well on the first four holes because they are so tight," Betsy would comment after the match. Although she drove into the right rough, the day was hers. She reached in two while Betty was on in three, some 10 feet from the hole. She would need as good a putt as she hit on 18 for par, but Betsy never gave her a chance. Her putt from 17 feet ran true, finding the bottom of the hole for a birdie 3. Betty Fehl's reign as the queen of women's golf was over. The new queen was a King.

Both players shot 77, seven over par on the tough Heidelberg layout. Fehl's consistent game—she had no three putts and four one-putts—could not overcome Betsy's length advantage. Betty never outdrove Betsy and she did not get home in two on any of the six par 4s in excess of 340 yards.

Another RCC player, **Noreen Uihlein**, stopped Fehl in the 1976 Berks amateur in a match that went 19 holes at Berkshire. Noreen had Betty down five holes after eight but Fehl pulled to within one after 12. Noreen reasserted herself and was dormie 3. But Betty was relentless and tied the match when Noreen three-putted the 18th. Uihlein fashioned a dramatic finish on the first extra hole, the par 5 first. She jarred a sand wedge from 60 yards for eagle three and the win.

The Big 33. Betty went on to win three more titles, her last coming in 1981 at age 58. She won her first championship as a 13-year-old in 1936. That's 33 titles over 45 years, a record that is even more remarkable considering there was no tournament from 1940 to 1947. She won 20 in a row starting in 1953. She did not defend in '73 but won in '74. Only a loss to **Mrs. Fred Morganstern** in 1952 kept Betty from winning 28 consecutive Berks County titles.

Betty was more than a home-town golfer. She won the Pennsylvania Women's Amateur twice, in 1950 at Berkshire C.C. and in 1965 at Valley C.C., near Hazleton. She also won the Central Pennsylvania Women's Amateur 15 times, the first in 1938 when she became the youngest winner at age 15. Her final Central Penn title was in 1978 at 56.

Fehl fell in '56. The one that got away was in 1956 when RCC hosted the tournament. Playing on her home course, Fehl was the people's choice to add a second state title.

Alas, it was not to be. After a resounding first-round 7 and 5 win over **Mrs. Leo Caruthers**, Coatesville C.C., Miss Fehl was on a razor's edge. She defeated **Mrs. Arthur Wilkie**, Cedarbrook C.C., in 20 holes, overcoming a 3-down deficit after five holes. She then won against **Miss Alice Gray**, Merion C.C., in 19 holes.

Maureen Riley, the qualifying medalist from New Castle, overwhelmed Betty in the semi-final match, winning 5 and 4. Riley's withering four-birdie, two-under-par 33 front nine left Fehl 4-down at the turn. She could not conjure her come-back magic and was closed out on 14.

Mrs. Arthur Dyson, Hazleton, won the title against Riley in a match that went the full 36 holes.

Betty died in 1986, age 63. She was survived by her husband, Howard Fegley, two step daughters, five step grandchildren and 11 step great-grandchildren.