

CAYLEFF, SUSAN E. *Babe! The Life and Legend of Babe Didrikson Zaharias*. Women in American History and Sport and Society Series. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996. Pp. xiv, 327. Notes, index, photographs, \$14.95 pb.

Author Susan E. Cayleff, a feminist scholar and a professor of women's studies at San Diego State University, began this book, like many sport historians, as a simple research project. This work, however, developed into a monumental task of investigating the life and career of one of the greatest female athletes, Babe Didrikson Zaharias, and eventually culminated into this significant historical biography.

As many know, Babe died of cancer in her forties. At the time Cayleff began her research she was teaching at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, where Zaharias had her operation. The author of two health books, she was interested in the coping strategies used by Babe as she lived with the diagnosis, surgery, and prognosis. Her access to medical records expanded "into a life study of an enigmatic and blustery personality" (p. xi).

Cayleff is a thoughtful scholar who must be commended for her vast array of sources from many personal interviews with family members, golfers, sportswriters, and other personalities who knew Babe, to numerous works, such as her autobiography and other biographies, and collections at the Babe Didrikson Zaharias Museum in Beaumont. To aid her in this huge project, she secured grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Babe Didrikson Zaharias Foundation, and from her present university, the San Diego State Foundation.

Through her investigation, Cayleff discovered that some of the auras that surrounded Babe and that attracted public admiration were not exactly what everyone believed. Most of all, Babe's Olympic performances in the 1932 Games in Los Angeles seemed unbelievable; in these Olympics Babe won two gold medals and a silver, which should have been a gold except the judges had never seen a female competitor go head first in the high jump so they disqualified her. However, they awarded her second place. According to the author, her silver medal was 50 percent gold and 50 percent silver, the only time in Olympic history such a medal has been awarded (p. 71). Due to her Olympic achievements, Babe was voted Female Athlete of the Year, and the public became more aware of this superior athlete. However, she rarely ever spoke of the Olympic Games and realized too late that her behavior was arrogant and nasty, which caused the rest of the American track team to dislike her intensely. Even later in life Cayleff states that Babe stuffed her medals into a coffee can and did not display them among her many trophies.

Thus, after these 1932 Games Babe faced two problems: how to earn a living and how to change the image she displayed at the Games. She did attempt to be a top tennis player, and being an all around athlete she probably could have succeeded in the quest except for one big hurdle. Cayleff explains that a shoulder injury due to an Olympic javelin throw prevented her from developing a powerful

overhead serve. This reason may have some merit, but it is far from the real truth of the matter. Due to this reviewer having access to the former files of the United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA) for tennis research, it was obvious from the correspondence read that the USLTA did not want this mannish looking, noncountry club person with a history of poor behavior in their tournaments. In other words, she did not fit the image of the type of competitor they wished for in the USLTA family. So, through the collusion of officials, her entry to tournaments was either declared past the deadline date or she was told the draw was full. She gave up on any idea of being a tennis champion.

Babe next turned to golf, a turning point in her career. Cayleff succinctly states that in golf, "an unimpeachable ladylike sport and active self-feminization, she (began) to transcend her past and get on with her future" (p. 133). After she won some well-known tournaments, she was banned for three years for being a professional as she accepted money for different promotional activities.

The next step for achieving a new image involved Babe's marriage. She accomplished this goal by marrying George Zaharias, a former wrestler, in 1938. Cayleff states that they were both big hustlers, which was a major attraction between them. But for Babe, even though she gained companionship and the socially accepted "Mrs." in front of her name, she lost much control over her life, as George took over and managed her career.

In 1945 she was allowed to re-enter tournament golf and started again on her fabulous career. Due to her fame, personality, and business sense, the game changed forever from "a game for girls, . . . to a business" (p. 159). As Patty Berg remarked, "our sport grew because of Babe" (p. 164). In 1949 she was the driving force behind the formation of the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), which at the time had six members. Soon it became the richest women's sport's organization of its era, mostly because of Babe and her special salesmanship talent. Louise Suggs, a fellow LPGA golfer, abhorred Babe's behavior and her poor sportsmanship when she lost, but knew the tour needed her. Twice Babe was elected LPGA president although not popular with her peers.

In 1953 Babe had to wear a colostomy bag as a result of her surgery for colon cancer. Despite this medical necessity, she returned to the links 14 weeks later, unusual at the time as most colostomy patients resorted to a life of inactivity. The next year, 1954, Babe won the United State's Women's Open and for this achievement she was awarded the Ben Hogan Comeback Player of the Year Award. She also was named female athlete of the year for the sixth time. No other athlete, male or female, has won this award so many times.

On Sept. 27, 1956, Babe Didrikson Zaharias died at the age of 45. In her 18-year dominance of women's golf, she won 82 tournaments and laid the foundation for the LPGA of today.

It is important to mention in this review that Cayleff states from the beginning of this book that "this writing is first and foremost grounded in feminist theory" (p. 8). Due to this focus the biography is interspersed with the watershed events in women's sport history accompanied by her views of the role of gender at the time. Often, these descriptions interfere with the development of the biography

and yet, at other times, the history complements the story in an important way.

Again, Cayleff must be complimented for her careful and expansive research. The book is divided into 11 chapters with catchy titles, such as "The Texas Tomboy, Not Everybody's Ordinary Girl," "Peaceful Transition—From Amateur Amazon to Professional Lady Golfer," and "Dominating the Fairways and Greens." At times the golf tournaments are described with too much detail and the reader loses interest. With her attention to detail it is surprising that Cayleff was not more attentive to the facts about Eleonora Sears. First of all, she spells her name incorrectly with an "a" instead of an "o" twice in the text, although it is accurate in the notes. Also, the tennis titles she states Miss Sears won belongs to another player, as Sears never won the national championship or Wimbledon.

This is an excellent biography of the greatest woman athlete of the first half of the nineteenth century, as voted by the United Press in 1950. Cayleff's 43 pages of annotated notes indicate her meticulous research. Although Cayleff pays much attention to feminist issues, she still has the facts to describe a remarkable woman. The last 16 pages provide an important index to the text. This book will be of interest to sport historians, scholars interested in women's sport personalities, and those who wish to know more about women golfers and the LPGA tour. A spin-off from the text may be research into other sportswomen who, along with Babe, helped found the LPGA.

—JOANNA DAVENPORT
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