

Joanne Winter - An Unsung Sports Heroine

JAMES ODENKIRK

Arizona State University

Before the advent of television, the Women's Liberation Movement, and Affirmative Action and Title IX, women's involvement in professional sports in America was little publicized. Sports chronicles do record the feats of such athletes as Zaharias, Berg, Ederle, Holm, Henie, Jacobs and Collett, among others. However, generally speaking, before 1950 a female athlete had few opportunities to participate in professional sports. Among factors which opened the doors for women athletes after World War II were the resumption of the Olympic Games in 1948, the reorganization of the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) in 1949, the development of the All-American Girls' Baseball League, and the mass production of television sets.

During this era, Joanne Winter distinguished herself by successfully competing in two professional sports, an uncommon feat by any standard. She was born November 24, 1924, and her home was Chicago. Winter, daughter of George and Edith Winter, attended Priviso Township High School where she earned 1200 Girls' Athletic Association points by the end of her Sophomore year.

Winter's athletic talents had not gone unnoticed and in 1940, at sixteen, she played semi-professional softball for the Parichy Bloomer girls. Her talents would eventually lead her to play in the All-American Girls Baseball League, which was formed in 1943 under the guidance of Philip K. Wrigley.

This league was created as a potential substitute for major league baseball during World War II. Winter, a pitching stalwart in this league, played seven years for the Racine (WI) Belles. As the League evolved and grew and as softball rules were replaced by baseball rules, Winter changed with the rules, learning how to pitch overhand. She compiled an enviable record, winning thirty-three games in 1946 and twenty-five games in 1948. Winter, an All-Star selection in 1946 and 1948, held all-time records for the most wins in one season and the most consecutive shutout games and innings.

After moving to Arizona in 1954, Winter continued pitching softball for the renowned A-1 Queens of Phoenix. But she soon developed an interest in golf, and after seven years of lessons and practice, she became a member of the LPGA in 1963. In that year, she competed in twenty-five tournaments as one of twenty-five full-time professional members of the touring circuit. Players on the tour in the mid-1960's included such golfing luminaries as Mickey Wright, Betsy Rawls, Kathy Whitworth, Sandra Haynie, and Shirley Engelhom.

After three years on the tour, Winter decided that teaching golf provided the challenge and security she sought for the remainder of her professional career. During the next twenty years, she distinguished herself as a master teacher of all age groups, and many members of the LPGA tour have profited from her tutelage. She has received many teaching awards, including the coveted LPGA Teacher of the Year Award in 1972.

The annals of women's professional sports before 1950 record the exploits of many women who excelled in one professional sport. Rare are the women athletes (Babe Didrikson Zaharias notwithstanding) who successfully competed in two professional sports. Joanne Winter epitomizes this remarkable accomplishment.