

Betty Stanhope-Cole

“To be a happy person, I couldn’t have gone any other way.”

In measuring Betty Stanhope-Cole’s accomplishments as a golfer, the question is not which championships she’s won, but how many times she’s won them. From the Provincial Championship (17 times) to the Edmonton City Championship (25 times), Betty owned the provincial record book from the 1950’s to the 1980’s.

As well, she’s won Canadian junior, amateur, and closed championships, been runner-up for the senior title, and competed internationally for Canada. Just to keep her life interesting, Betty also skipped three Alberta Championship Curling Teams. Her team placed second in the 1978 Lassie and has won 13 zone and Edmonton Championships.

Indicative of Betty’s unrelenting ability to compete is that in winning her 25th Edmonton golf championship, she defeated Heather Lee whose grandmother (Hazel Jamieson) and mother (Gale Lee) Betty had also golfed against.

But, in a world where high profile athletes with exemplary records are expected to be outgoing, charismatic and even inspirational, Betty is an anomaly: she’d rather play golf than talk about golf.

“I’m pretty much an introvert,” she says. “I don’t deal well with a lot of people.”

Today, Betty is a grandmother in her early 70’s and lives in a southwest Edmonton main floor condo overlooking a small park. “It’s very functional,” she says, “and it has an open feel that I like.”

She has dark steady eyes that are a challenge to meet and she moves with a fluid, youthful gracefulness that must be the envy of other senior ladies.

The only acknowledgement that Betty makes of her golfing accomplishments is contained in a basement corner of her condo where she displays photographs of some of the golf friends she has made.

Betty grew up in the oilfield town of Turner Valley, south of Calgary, where in the 1940’s her father was a toolpusher and later a drilling foreman.

Even though the town had a pasture-type golf course, Betty didn’t take up golf with her parents, preferring school sports and horseback riding. The family followed the oil industry to Edmonton after the 1947 Leduc discovery and there Betty accidentally discovered golf as a young teenager.



Betty Stanhope-Cole, (far L), as she entered her first tournaments. ca. 1952.

“It was really a set-up,” she says. Her father had booked himself a lesson with Alex Olynk and then, mysteriously, had to cancel. Her mother then arranged for Betty to take the lesson.

By the end of the summer Betty was working at the driving range with a crowd of boys and hitting all the golf balls she could but rarely playing a match.

“It was ideal ... the right training for me. Alex was so good with juniors and beginners.”

In 1951 Betty’s parents joined the Highlands Golf Club.

“I remember going down the hill to the golf club the first time ... and there was Henry (Martell) by the pro shop. He had a mat and was hitting balls off a tee.

“I was just in awe of his wonderful golf swing and how far he could hit a ball.

“I spent most of my days there. I hung around the pro shop a lot. There weren’t any girls around my age so I played a lot by myself. You could just go on a fairway and hit balls.”

Despite not having played many matches, Betty entered the city juniors.

“In those days it was 21 and under. I got to the 8th hole and I hit into the trees on the right. I went for the green and ended up playing all the way in the bush. I think I scored in the double figures.

“I might have come second. I don’t know. But I do know I didn’t win.”

Cathy Galusha McMillan



Betty Stanhope-Cole was honoured in Edmonton as a park overlooking the Highlands GC was named after her.

By 1953 Betty, age 15, began to win. "At first I wasn't going to enter the provincial juniors," she says, but was persuaded by her father and others.

"It was match play. Three rounds. I got to the finals against Mona Morup. She was the daughter of the greenkeeper from the Calgary Golf and Country Club.

"I wasn't nervous or anything. I just played and I beat her."

"My dad seemed really pleased. That got me hooked."

Three decades later, Betty was still winning.

While she doesn't like talking at length about her golf, Betty opens up quickly when asked about Henry Martell. "I loved playing with Henry. He was so good to me. I caddied for him and I learned a lot about golf that way from him.

"He would talk to me. About how to handle a bad lie. About wind. About course management."

But, she says, her interest in golf has now changed. "Today I'm a fair-weather golfer. I've played in the rain and in storms. I've done that and I'm done with it.

"I got burned out," she explains. "I played at a high competitive level. I never got away from the stress. Now I have almost no interest. Part of me would like to play more, but part of me says 'Why?'"

In looking back on her golf career, she understands the price competitive golf has cost her and what she has

had to overcome: from a divorce to injuries, to scoliosis and a kidney transplant.

"To be a competitive golfer, or any athlete, you have to have a bit of selfishness to succeed."

"But I had to do it. To be a happy person I couldn't have gone any other way."

Her last competitions were in the late 1990's as a senior. Since then Betty has been playing off-and-on with a ladies group at the Highlands who, as friend 80-year-old Enid Hart humorously notes "found her quite intimidating at first. We were embarrassed to ask her to play with us.

"We didn't think we could help her with her game."

The group, which likes to take a little time to discuss the scenery while golfing, has learned that Betty is not a 'chatterer' nor will she often stay afterwards and have a meal in the clubhouse.

"She's usually busy. She doesn't like sitting around with the girls. When she does, she rarely talks about her golf — you never hear her brag — but she will talk about her world travels. When she opens up, she's a lot of fun," said Hart.

However, the group has learned that on the course Betty can still get impatient when players are talking, not golfing.

"We think she's mellowed — but every now and then you'll hear her say, 'Come on. Speed it up.'"



In the summer of 1963, 16-year-old Cathy Galusha left the sand greens of her rural, nine-hole Ponoka course to play Canada's best junior girls on the manicured Rivermead fairways and grass greens in Hull, Quebec. She returned home as the Canadian Junior Girls Champion and was treated by her hometown to a celebration parade and given the keys to the town by the Mayor.

Looking back to that summer, Cathy is still slightly overwhelmed by the town's warm response. Then, almost as an afterthought, she points out something that many golf historians have overlooked: "I was probably the last Canadian Champion to come from a course with sand greens."

Playing sand greens, she says, was almost like playing a sand trap — the ball doesn't roll so where it landed was where you played it. The sand was mixed with oil to keep it in place.

Because the golfers ahead of you always left the sand tracked up, you were allowed to mat the sand - smooth it with a rake or board to give you a smooth putting surface.

In a career that encompasses 14 provincial teams, including the senior squad which won four of five Canadian titles, one of Cathy's best memories is from the 1963 Junior Championships when Betty Stanhope-Cole and Rae Milligan, competing in the Ladies event, ran to her side to congratulate her. "I'll never forget the way they shouted 'You won!'"

And, as far as the sand greens go, Cathy doesn't miss them. "Your shoes and socks were always black by the end of a round."