

# BABE DIDRIKSON

b. June 26, 1911

d. September 27, 1956

## GOLF LEGEND

*“My goal was to be the greatest athlete who ever lived.”*

**She was an American Olympic gold medalist and legendary golfer.**

Recognized as one of the greatest athletes of all time, Mildred Ella “Babe” Didrikson earned Olympic gold in track and field, starred in basketball and baseball, and won 10 major Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) championships.

The sixth of seven children, Didrikson was born in Port Arthur, Texas, and grew up in Beaumont. Her parents emigrated from Norway. As a child, Didrikson earned the nickname “Babe,” after Babe Ruth, for her reputation as a baseball slugger. In high school she competed in track and field and basketball, then left to play basketball for the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU).

Didrikson competed in track and field at the 1932 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. She won two gold medals—one in the 80-meter hurdles and one in the javelin throw, setting world records in each—and a silver medal in the high jump. She is the only athlete to win Olympic medals in running, throwing and jumping events.

Between 1932 and 1935, Didrikson played baseball for the New Orleans Pelicans and the St. Louis Cardinals. Around the same time, she took up golf, the sport that earned her the greatest recognition. She won the U.S. Women’s Amateur tournament in 1946 and became the first American to win the British Ladies Amateur Tournament in 1947, the year she turned pro.

By 1950 Didrikson had won virtually every existing golf tournament or title, including the 1948 U.S. Women’s Open. She became a founding member of the LPGA.

Didrikson was inducted into LPGA Hall of Fame in 1951 and the National Women’s Hall of Fame in 1976. The Associated Press named her Female Athlete of the Year six times between 1932 and 1954 and Female Athlete of the Half Century in 1950.

Though the press and public lauded her ability, she was often belittled for her “mannish” appearance. Perhaps as a reaction, Didrikson married George Zaharias, a professional wrestler, in 1938. Didrikson had a long, intimate relationship with fellow golfer Betty Dodd, whom she toured with on the golf circuit. During the last six years of Didrikson’s life, Dodd moved in with her and Zaharias.

In addition to her athletic prowess, Didrikson’s talents included competitive sewing, pocket billiards, and singing and playing harmonica in her own successful vaudeville show. “Babe,” a 1975 television biopic on Didrikson, won a Golden Globe Award. The Babe Didrikson Zaharias Museum and Visitor Center in Beaumont, Texas, houses her Olympic medals, golf clubs and other memorabilia.

Didrikson died of colon cancer at the age of 45.

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