

Chapter Five: Mary Jane Schiltz

1930 was the year that a fourteen year old girl begins golf lessons with Bill Thompson, the club professional at The Congress Lake Club. In the late 1800's, Congress Lake Club, in Hartville, Ohio began as a recreational destination for Cantonians. The Connotton Valley Railroad brought visitors to the lake for dancing, fishing, swimming, golfing and other activities. Visitors originally stayed at the hotel and at summer cottages located around the lake. In the late 1920's, one of these cottages was owned by Mr. Harold Schiltz of North Canton. His daughter Mary Jane would spend summers at his cottage. Also visiting the cottage was another remarkable athlete, her young uncle Evan. Evan was her senior by only two years. He was born in 1914, Mary Jane 1916. Mary Jane's daughter Mrs. Melissa Smith explained, "Evan was my grandfather's half-brother and he was mothers age. My grandfather's mother died and his father married his mother's much younger sister and they had Evan. Evan was not a cousin, but an uncle to mother."

At this time, country clubs provided women with the best opportunity to pursue non rigorous sports like archery, tennis, golf, and swimming. Scholar Susan Cahn suggests that, "country club sports like tennis and swimming, with their leisure-class and feminine-fashion associations, allowed white heroines like Helen Wills and Gertrude Ederle to capitalize on the flapper era's love affair with sophisticated outdoorswomen: They helped fashion a new ideal of womanhood by modeling an athletic, energetic femininity with an undertone of explicit, joyful sexuality."

The 1930's also saw the collapse of many of the taboos surrounding female athletes. Women were not allowed to compete in the Olympics until 1920. Women gained recognition as athletes in the 1930's. Babe Didrikson entered 634 different sporting events during the decade and won 632 of them. She lost one basketball game and was disqualified from a high-jump competition after having apparently set a world record. Sonja Henie (1912–1969) popularized figure skating. Both Didrikson and Henie became millionaires by demonstrating their sporting abilities. Virnett Beatrice "Jackie" Mitchell (1914–1987) was the first woman to sign with a professional baseball team. Her fame soared when she struck out both Babe Ruth (1895–1948) and Lou Gehrig (1903–1941) in an exhibition game in 1931. For women, there were no major golf tournaments up until 1930 when the Women's Western Open was inaugurated.

It is within this background that Mary Jayne Schiltz begins a most remarkable journey. Mary Jane witnessed Uncle Evan win the Stark county junior golf title the same year. "Mother, (Mary Jane) was a fierce competitor." Her daughter Melissa remarked, "When mother tried something, she went all in." No doubt she watched uncle Evan's prowess with some competitive envy. Mary Jane continues to practice under the tutelage of the professional Mr. Thompson. With three years instruction under her belt, Mary Jane and Mr. Thompson decide it's time to compete.



One would think her season to be over at this point but that was hardly the case. Firestone Country Club hosts a lady invitational August 20th. Sixty-one women participated. Mary Jane Schiltz wins this event. Shortly after this event, playing at her home course, Congress Lake, she establishes a new woman's course record scoring 76 strokes.

College life is on her horizon. Mary Jane enrolls in Randolph-Macon school for girls in Lynchburg Virginia.

The 1935 season approaches. June 24th an exhibition was held in Akron. The Match was held at the Portage Country Club with the headliner being Ms. Joyce Wethered. Ms. Wethered was revered as the queen of British amateur golf. Her accomplishments include four time winner of the British Women's Amateur, a five time winner of The English Ladies' Championship, and served as a leading force in the women's Curtis Cup. As the reigning Akron Women's District champion and young darling of the Akron District, Mary Jane was asked to play. Included in the exhibition were Portage Country Club professional, Al Esponoso, and Fairlawn professional Ed Kirby. Al was a very accomplished player in his own right. He won nine times on the PGA tour including the PGA Championship. A huge gallery followed the group. *The Akron Beacon Journal* reported Ms. Wethered posting a 74 for the day.

July was an unbelievably busy golf month for Mary Jane. The month started very well. Mary Jane won the Congress Lake Invitational besting Eva Shorb. Winning the event she set another women's course record at Congress Lake. She posted a 75 bettering her previous record of 76. She played in the State Women's tournament but failed to qualify. At the Fairlawn Invitational in mid-month she was also victorious. In her haste to get home she was arrested for speeding on an Akron street. She had to pay a fine of ten dollars.

On the 20th of the month, discussing her game with an Akron Beacon Journal reporter, she casually mentioned a hand injury. She and Mr. Thompson tried to repeat as Pro – Lady champions but finished third. This was on the 22nd of the month. This particular event is a precursor to the Women's Akron District Championship. This time she was unable to defeat Mrs. Weirich in the final match. If her hand injury had any influence on the outcome of her match, we do not know.





There seems to have been some controversy concerning her swing. Local professionals remarked she has a sound game but one fault. She is too fast with her backswing. The contention is the fast backswing results in over swinging. Another critique was whether she could hold up under pressure. But Mary Jane's game proved unaffected by this perceived fault. Coach Bill Thompson stated that he is not concerned and is content to let her swing grow with her.

1932 marks her first competition. She plays in the Women's Akron District Championship. The *Akron Beacon Journal* described Mary Jane as, "a mere slip of a girl, who has a prodigious shot off the tees and who knows how to wield an iron." She won her first round match by, default, against Mrs. T.F. Hudson, a member of Fairlawn. Her second match was played against Mrs. J.R. Mercer also of Fairlawn Country Club. Mrs. Mercer defeated Mary Jane and went on to win the event. The same event hosts the district women's long drive competition. Mary Jane competed and won with a drive of 225 yards. This confirms her "prodigious" tee shot as mentioned in the newspaper.

Without doubt Mary Jane looked forward to the season of 1934. A senior at North Canton High School, she now has gained a years' experience to play top level golf. The Stark County Women's Championship was played June 28. For the second year, she was barely clipped by the younger Eva Shorb from Massillon.

In early July she travels to Toledo. The Ohio State tournament was being played at the formidable Toledo Inverness Golf Club, a championship course designed by noted architect Mr. Donald Ross. Mary Jane won the qualifying event. Unfortunately she did not advance past the first round in the tournament.



MISS MARY JANE SCHILTZ

Mary Jane and Uncle Evan decided to play in the annual Tri-County mixed two-ball tournament. The event was held at Orchard Hills. Evan was an accomplished golfer and athlete. He led the Mt. Union College golf team. He also was an All-Ohio Conference basketball player and was inducted into the Mt. Union Athletic Hall of Fame. Evan was a qualifier for the U.S. Amateur Championship in 1933, and went on to win the Stark County Amateur Championship in 1936 and 1946. Evan turned professional and began ten years as a teaching professional. In the Canton Area, his first year was spent at Orchard Hills. He then moved to Canton Edgewood. He remained there for nine years. During this tenure he continued his full-time career at The Hoover Company. Evan regained his amateur status after retiring from professional golf. In his fifties, Evan began a stretch of four Brookside Country Club Championships between 1968 and 1975 and won the Great Lakes Senior Championship. Mary Jane and Evan win the event.

Mary Jane truly demonstrates her prowess in 1933. She competed in the Stark County Women's Championship. She lost her match to Mrs. Barrick one down on the nineteenth hole.

In July she competes in the Women's Akron District Championship. She won medalist honors in the WADGA championship qualifier. Her first match was against Mrs. Mary Anne Mather of Portage Country Club. She defeated Mary Anne 5 and 4. Next up was Mrs. W. Langford, a fellow Congress Lake member. Mrs. Langford was dispatched 7 and 6. The semifinals paired her against Mrs. Paul Robinson from Portage Country Club. Mrs. Robinson meets a similar fate being defeated by a 5 to 4 margin. She wins the WADGA Championship against a formidable opponent in Mrs. E.A. Bedell of Fairlawn C.C. She becomes the first Cantonian since 1927 to win the Championship.

She was runner up medalist in the qualifier for the Ohio State Women's Championship. Barely defeating her was Ms. Ruth Transue. Ruth was a member of the Congress Lake club and sister to Oliver. Oliver was a Club Champion at Congress Lake, captain of Yale's golf team and one of northeast Ohio's most recognizable golfers. Mary Jane won her first round match. She lost in the quarter final round to a defending state champion. An event at the state championship was the long drive competition. She competed in and won the Ohio State Women's Long drive competition with a strike of 252 yards.

Mary Jane qualified for a trip to the 37th Women's U.S.G.A. National Championship at Exmoor, in Highland Park, Illinois by winning the Women's Akron District Championship. She and her Aunt made the journey to the Chicago area. Unfortunately, she missed qualifying for the event by two strokes. Interestingly, the first hole she played was her doom. She scored a double bogey seven. Also of note is that Exmoor Golf Course is a Donald Ross Design.

Returning to Canton She competes in the district Pro-Lady tournament with her mentor Bill Thompson. The Tam O'Shanter course proved no match for the duo. They set an amazing scoring record of two under par 70. Mr. & Mrs. George Howard of Brookside C.C. finished second with a 74.

Next up was the WADGA Brookside Invitational. She wins the event. Later in the month she establishes a new woman's course record at Brookside with an 80.

Finally, in 1933 she was awarded the "Greatest sports achievement of the year award," by Clayton G. Horn, sports writer from the Canton Repository. She narrowly defeated another Congress Lake member Oliver Transue, a previous winner.

Frank Deems' North Canton property was turned into The Orchard Hills golf course. The first nine holes were created in 1924, the second nine in 1929. In 1948 the course was renamed to Arrowhead. Today it is the Fairways of North Canton.



With a field of almost fifty teams, from all over Ohio, Evan and young Mary Jane triumphed. They won by two shots over Mr. Ralph Doll of Highland Links and Mrs. H.K. Johns of Orchard Hills. Mary Jane and her mentor coach Bill Thompson again compete in the mixed pro-lady. They defended their previous year's win paying against a significant field of pro-women teams.

This leads us to the Women's Akron District Championship to be contested at the staid Portage Country Club. In the semifinal match play event, Ms. Schiltz defeated Mrs. T.S. Hudson from the Fairlawn Country Club 4 and 2. In the other bracket, Mrs. Weirich defeated Mrs. H. O. Smith from Portage Country Club 5 and 4.

A gallery of nearly a thousand was treated to an excellent championship match. The match was tied on the eleventh hole when Mrs. Weirich holed a forty-five foot putt. Mary Jane made a birdie on the twelfth but was prevented from winning the thirteenth when her opponent laid her a dead stymie. (Ed. Note) A stymie occurred when your opponent blocked the hole with their ball. This rule is no longer in existence. Mary Jane wins the fourteenth hole and outlasts her opponent to win 3 and 2.

Mary Jane Schiltz repeats as Akron District Women's Golf Champion.

July 26th Mary Jane played in the Stark County Women's tournament and again was runner-up to Eva Shorb. Eva seemed to have Mary Jane's number in this event besting her three consecutive times. Eva was not just the usual competitor. Eva Shorb went on to win the Stark County Women's Championship and the Akron Women's District title five times between 1935 and 1941. She played in the Women's Western Amateur and the National Women's Amateur. In the 1936 USGA national championship, she lost on the final hole to the legendary Patty Berg. Eva married Tom Weiskopf Sr. Tom Senior won the 1940 Stark County Open. The couple had three children, including Tom Jr., who became one of the top players on the PGA Tour. Eva is a member of the Stark County Amateur Golf Hall of Fame.

It is at this time within the story life begins to happen. Mary Jane returned to college at Randolph – Macon. It seems that one interested spectator watching her golf exploits, was interested in more than bogey's, pars, and birdies. So much so that Mary Jane transfers from Randolph – Mason to Northwestern University in Illinois to be closer to him. Local newspapers continue to mention her past accomplishments. Life had her travel, raise her children, and a very, very, few times she even played some golf.

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