

Mary Elizabeth Gay

Mary Gay's legacy to golf and sport lies between the lines of her record of achievements. While competing in some of Canada's top tournaments in the 1950s, she finished "runner-up" in all but one.



While Gay was one of Canada's best female golfers, she happened to be competing at a time when one of the country's amateur golf legends hit the scene. Marlene Stewart Streit went on to become the first Canadian inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame.

One can only imagine the tenacity and heart Gay possessed to continually finish second. Gay won the Canadian Amateur Open in 1952, but was runner-up to Streit for the Canadian Athlete of the Year award.

Gay's list of achievements is impressive. She was runner-up in five Canadian Open championships and three Ontario Opens. She was runner-up in two Alberta Open tournaments and runner-up again in four Canadian Close championships. Gay was a member of the 1953 Canadian team that competed in Britain, and the first Commonwealth Team to Britain in 1959.

Gay, who joined the Westmount Golf and Country Club in 1952, paying a \$25 membership fee, managed all of this success while working at Mutual Life Assurance Company, now Sun Life. She remained a Westmount member until her death in 2000.

"If Mary had chosen to concentrate on golf, she would have made an excellent living as a professional," local golf pro Gus Maue said once. "I think she would have won on the American tour."

Gay was born in Cambridge and attended Galt Collegiate before leaving school in grade eleven to work and pursue her love of golf. Gay had been introduced to the game when she was thirteen by her father who felt she had athletic ability. Unfortunately, her father died before she achieved national recognition. Gay had just arrived at the Canadian championships in Montreal in 1951 when she received word that her father had passed away.

During her career she was known as the "Ontario ace" who had "an absolutely gorgeous swing" and a "great work ethic and determination." She has been inducted into the Waterloo County Sports Hall of Fame and was nominated to the Canadian Golf Hall of Fame.

Gay's love of sport was also evident on the curling rink. In 1962 and 1963 she was the skip on the winning rinks in the Ontario Business Women's championship. She was also an avid bridge player and hockey enthusiast. Even during the final weeks of her life, Gay insisted on watching her beloved Toronto Blue Jays.

During the highs of her amateur golf career, Mary Gay was known to provide some of the most tense and exciting games in amateur women's golf. The joy she took in playing golf and her competitive and sportsmanlike conduct made her an inspiration to young athletes.

“Friends say that she was an ambassador of the game, combining sportsmanship and hard work, always cheerful with a reserved sense of humour.”

Photo courtesy of the Westmount Golf and Country Club fonds at the University of Waterloo.