

# Canadian champ at 17

# Marlene is still swinging

By SHEILA MCLEOD

STOUFFVILLE — Ask any "swinger" battling over the fairways at Rolling Hills and he's bound to identify Marlene Stewart Streit as the name of this country's foremost amateur golfer. What he may not know is that the lady herself lives across the intervening rough on the 6th

Concession, about a par 13 way. Her name, of course, has been on the lips of the sports media for years. It has become synonymous with championship golf. Marlene Stewart was a 17-year-old sensation from Fonthill when she first swept to victory in 1951 to become one of the youngest contestants to capture the Canadian

championship. Now, a White-church-Stouffville housewife, and a reigning Canadian Amateur for the 15th time, the sensational aspect of her youthful debut may have diminished, but the winning ways have not. Her eloquent words, irons and putter have talked their way to win in practically every major amateur tournament in North America, as well as the British and Australian

championships. They spoke so persuasively she became one of the original recipients of the Order of Canada in 1967, twice winner of the Lou March (top Canadian sportsman-of-the-year) Award, and was elevated, in ultimate recognition, to the Sports Hall of Fame as well as the Golf Hall of Fame.

It may hearten the Rolling Hills duffer that Mrs. Streit recalls "no natural ability" when she first started swinging at a golfball.

Like the newspaper carrier who became publisher, Marlene started her ascent as a 12-year-old caddie at Lookout Point Golf Club in Fonthill. Eventually, she toted clubs and shied balls for resident Pro, Gordon McInnis. He, in turn allowed his caddie to "hit a few and, because she was engrossed in the game and loved to practice, took a special interest in her development as a golfer.

While she continued to caddie to help with finances, Marlene also became a member of the club when she was 15. After one season of competitive play, she reached the quarter-finals of the Canadian Amateur. The following year, in Montreal, the coveted title fell to the young golf whizz.

Looking back to the early wide-spread publicity acclaim and public response, Marlene remembers thankfully that "enough nice people were around to knock me down and keep me from getting up-in-the-air. I've learned that, once you start reading and believing press clippings, you're sunk."

Enrolled in Rollins College, Florida, in 1952, she graduated with a B.A.

in Business Administration four years later. "Mind you," Mrs. Streit admits with a laugh, "I was working on my golf as much as anything and made sure all my classes met in the morning. I also felt, if I got through the business course, I could at least be an intelligent secretary."

The young collegian competed in the British championship at Porthcawl, Wales, in 1953. Winning the British amateur crown that Coronation Year, at age 19, was, she considers, her most exciting moment in golf. The most unforgettable moment, she recalls with a groan, was a put missed in defence of the title the following year. "It was," she assess, holding her hands a banana-span apart, "this long."

While winning the British title was the greatest thrill, capturing the U.S. Amateur in 1956, fulfilled a dream and peaked a bumper year that netted victories in a string of prestigious tournaments south of the border, as well as the Ontario and Canadian championships.

Marlene has been a consistent winner in major competition over the year. In team play she has represented her country in the Commonwealth and World tournaments, travelling to Britain, Australia (where she stopped long enough to capture the county's amateur title in 1963), Mexico, Spain and, last year, Buenos Aires.

Mrs. Streit, her husband Douglas, a geologist from Kentucky who she married shortly after graduation, along with daughters Darlene (13) and Lynne (11), moved from Toronto to their spacious estate home on Conc. 6 three years ago. The lady-of-the-house has an enthusiastic domestic inclination that clearly establishes family and home as top priorities.

Although her initials may work out to M.S., don't preface Marlene Streit, housewife and golf star, with the Ms. of Women's Lib. She's quite willing to accept woman's status in the home and on the course. She has too much respect for the top male golfers; hitting power to suggest in a la

King Bobby Riggs confrontation. "I think," she admits, "the 'Babe' (Zaharias) was the only woman golfer who could compete on an equal basis. As for playing the old guys, I think they'd just outsmart us."

Looking contentedly across the pond (a sizeable water hazard) to the stretches of autumn land beyond her living-room window, Marlene assesses that she is probably playing "better and smarter golf" than in the early years when she "lived the game." Now she paces herself to three major tournaments and test matches in the year. "I keep on going," she reflects, "because I still have the ability. When I lose it...that's that. There will be no regrets. Golf opened up a wonderful life for me and I think what I value more than anything else are the people I have met, and become friends with, along the way."



Marlene (Stewart) Streit, Canada's foremost lady golfer, poses beside a well-stocked trophy case in her home on the sixth concession of Whitechurch-Stouffville. Sheila McLeod

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