

# IOWA HISTORY



(Photo Courtesy Library of Congress)

## Iowa Girl Claims National Golf Title in 1939

Sports reporters in 1935 called her a “black eyed little youngster” who was “reared with golf clubs in hands.” They wrote that she could “apply the pressure when the going is toughest” and they said she had “a heart of steel.” Not only that “fans like to watch her” and she has a “perfect golfing temperament.” Even non-golfers were fascinated with this sporting sensation.

Everyone in Iowa was talking about the 14-year old girl golfer, Edith Estabrooks (spelled Estabrook in some sources), from Dubuque in the summer of 1935. Actually, some people had been noticing her two years earlier. In 1933 and '34—at the ages of 12 and 13—the child star had participated in the Iowa women’s golf championship tournament. She didn’t win the championship in either year, but she *did* take the championship in 1935.

Edith had been victorious over “red-headed” Charlotte Ames of Clear Lake in the semi-finals where she “blasted out” her competitor to advance to the finals. She showed “sensational playing” to defeat 21-year-old Jennet Jones from Des Moines for the title of Iowa’s best woman golfer.

One reporter predicted, “a new woman golf star is appearing on the national horizon in little Edith Estabrooks.” And another described her as “the diminutive entry who swept through the tournament with a championship brand of golf.”

Edith’s golf instruction started when she was only 6 years old. She had been “wielding the clubs” ever since she was “small enough to crawl into a golf bag” according to one writer. Edith’s dad was owner of the Bunker Hill golf course in Dubuque. She wintered in LaJolla, California, with her family and had played in championship tournaments there. Edith put in “no less than half an hour of concentrated practice every day.”

In 1936 she again won the Iowa state championship and planned to enter additional tournaments later that summer—including a national competition. “Dad and Mother said I could

enter three major meets this year,” Edith said. And one of those tournaments turned out to be a momentous one for her.

The Western Girls’ Junior Open Championship—a national competition—was played in Detroit, and in July 1936 it was an especially challenging event because of the extreme heat. With a “remarkable display of putting skill” Edith moved into the finals of the tournament where she battled for the top spot against a hometown girl, 17-year-old Hope Seignious. Despite a “determined bid” by Seignious, Edith captured the championship under 100-degree heat!

By 1939 Edith had won her fourth Iowa women’s golf title and had made a name for herself at the national level. In August she competed in another national competition—the Women’s Western Amateur Tournament. There she “came back with a rush” to score a “stunning upset” in the quarter finals over the previous year’s champion, Marion Miley of Kentucky, to make it to the semi-finals. She defeated Harriet Randall of Indiana in the semi-finals. That left only Ella Mae Williams of Chicago—and Edith did it! Just out of high school, the 18-year-old Iowan was the champion of the women’s golf world!

In 1940 Edith chose not to compete to defend her national title in Seattle. It was reported that she was giving up the sport “for pursuit of college studies.” In 2013 Edith was inducted into the Iowa Golf Hall of Fame.

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