

PNGA Hall of Famer Betty Jean (Rucker) Hulteng passes

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Betty Jean (Rucker) Hulteng passed peacefully on September 22, 2017 in Hayden Lake, Idaho. She was 93. Betty Jean has been an inspiration to generations and will be missed in immeasurable ways. She had a profound impact on people throughout her lifetime.



Her many careers included hospital administration in Rhode Island, Stanford alum, Junior League, Kappa Kappa Gamma, Mughunters, Hayden Lake historian, and the Grasshopper newspaper.

She was inducted into the PNGA Hall of Fame in 1995.

Her many accomplishments do not capture the true spirit of Betty Jean. She brought insight, wisdom and tremendous passion to every facet of her life. Her devotion to family was evident in everything she did. She was married to John L. Hulteng for nearly 50 years until his death in 1996. She is survived by their three children, Robert, Karen and Richard and their families and her grandchildren.

Betty Jean saw a silver lining in any situation and always strived to help people be the best that they could be. She was humble, compassionate, wise, witty, devoted to family and a master storyteller. Her love of history and talent at storytelling wove generations together with a true appreciation for family and tradition. As a longtime resident of Hayden Lake, Betty Jean had a deep impact on her home community, everything from inspiring generations of young golfers, reviving the history of the area or maintaining her childhood home for future generations to cherish just as she did.

Betty Jean, known affectionately as “B.J.” to friends, began winning golf championships early on. Her victory in the 1939 Spokane Women’s City Amateur at the tender age of 15 captured front-page headlines in Spokane’s Daily Chronicle. She would also win that title each year between 1942 and 1944.

B.J. won the club championship at Hayden Lake Country Club over 20 times - her first title while in college and her final victory 50 years later.



Betty Jean gave numerous clinics and exhibitions during her prime in the 1940s.

During World War II, most competitive golf events were suspended. However, the game of golf continued. According to one local pundit, “Sound golf advice continued to come from such notable players as Don Moe, Jack Westland, Harry Givan, Bud Ward and Bill Welch, who all helped to season an erratic golf game.”

It was during the 1940s that B.J. enjoyed most of her success in the Northwest, winning the PNGA Women’s Amateur Championship in 1945 and 1946. She was also the qualifying medalist four times, in 1941, 1945, 1946 and 1957.

B.J. competed nationally several times early in her career but, until 1944, experienced only modest success. She decided to try one more big tournament, the 1944 Broadmoor Invitational in Colorado Springs, arguably the nation’s most prestigious women’s amateur event at that time next to the U.S. Women’s Amateur. Not only did she win the Broadmoor Invitational, but was the qualifying co-medalist as she burst onto the national golf scene.

Probably the best year of B.J.’s illustrious career was 1946. She captured the qualifying medalist honors, while breaking the women’s course record at Tacoma Country & Golf Club with a 74, and won the PNGA Women’s Amateur Championship. B.J. also advanced to the semifinals of the inaugural U.S. Women’s Open (which later came under the auspices of the USGA), played at Spokane Country Club. It was the first and only time the event used a match-play format, and B.J. defeated several professionals before bowing to the legendary Patty Berg on the 35th hole.

In 1946 she added the Washington State Women’s Golf Association Championship to her growing list of victories. Later that summer, she was invited to play in an exhibition at Seattle’s Broadmoor Golf Club with the renowned pro, Betty Jameson, and the famous “Gold Dust Twins,” Byron Nelson and Jug McSpadden. Needless to say, the foursome drew huge crowds.

On her way to New York in search of a job, the Stanford graduate concluded her momentous summer by stopping in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to compete in the U.S. Women’s Amateur at Southern Hills Country Club. She played marvelously, but couldn’t overcome the great Babe Didrikson Zaharias, who defeated B.J. in the



Betty Jean (Rucker) Hulteng in the 1940s.

second round en route to winning the title.

In June 1947, at Hayden Lake Country Club in Idaho, B.J. married John Hulteng. The new couple left the Northwest and moved to Rhode Island, where John had accepted a position as an editorial writer for a major newspaper. B.J. barely missed a beat in her new environs, taking her wonderful golf game to the East Coast. In 1948 B.J. won the first of her six Rhode Island Women's Amateur Championships.

In 1955 the Hultengs returned to the Northwest. Two years later, B.J. made what she considered her "last serious attempt to win another PPGA Women's Amateur Championship." It was played at her home course, Hayden Lake Country Club. After sharing medalist honors with clubmate Connie Oldershaw, B.J. advanced to the semifinals, where eventual champion Carol Jo Kabler defeated her by a slim 1-up margin.

A champion in every sense of the word, B.J. is one of a long list of outstanding women amateurs who call the Northwest "home." She served as a devoted volunteer for the PPGA in course rating and championship administration roles and, since 1990, volunteered as a PPGA Club Representative from Hayden Lake Country Club.

In recognition for her service as a volunteer and her myriad accomplishments in the sport, Betty Jean (Rucker) Hulteng was inducted into the Pacific Northwest Golf Hall of Fame in 1995.

Accomplishments:

- U.S. Women's Open Semifinalist (Match Play) 1946
- U.S. Women's Amateur Quarterfinalist 1949 & 1953
- PPGA Women's Amateur Champion 1945 & 1946; Medalist 1941, 1945, 1946 & 1957
- Broadmoor Invitational Champion 1944
- Washington State Women's Golf Association Champion 1946
- Rhode Island Women's Amateur Champion 1948, 1949, 1950, 1952, 1953 & 1955
- Spokane Women's City Amateur Champion 1939, 1942, 1943 & 1944
- Inducted into Pacific Northwest Golf Hall of Fame 1995

(Most of the material above is from the PPGA Centennial history book, "Championships & Friendships," written by Michael Riste and Jeff Shelley.)



A 22-year-old Betty Jean Rucker with the great Patty Berg after Berg had just defeated her in a close semifinal match in the 1946 U.S. Women's Open at Spokane Country Club.

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