


BIOGRAPHY

Babe Didrikson Zaharias

As 1932 dawned, sports lovers across the world faced a dismal prospect. It was an Olympic year and the games were scheduled to take place in Los Angeles. But the Depression had left the United States and other countries so short of funds that it looked as though they would not be able to field Olympic teams. The 1932 Los Angeles Olympic games were about to be called off. To a young American athlete named Babe Didrikson, this would be pure heartbreak.

As you read the passage below, think about how powerful a combination of talent and determination can be in life.

Mildred Ella Didrikson has been acclaimed the outstanding woman athlete of the first half of the twentieth century. As a girl in Beaumont, Texas, she could never resist joining in a baseball game, and her ability to hit home runs soon earned her the nickname “Babe,” after Babe Ruth.

It was, however, her outstanding performance on the basketball court in high school that started her on a sports career. Dazzled by her scoring talent, the coach of the Golden Cyclones signed her up. Sponsored by an insurance company, the Cyclones were a women’s basketball team whose members also played softball and ran track and field.

A STAR IS BORN

In the two years she spent on the Cyclones team, Babe Didrikson was twice selected All-American basketball forward. In 1932 the coach sent Babe on her own to represent the Cyclones at the National Women’s Track and Field Championships. “You can win the national championship for us all by yourself,” he told her. Babe entered eight of the ten events and later described what happened: “For two-and-a-half hours I was flying all over

the place. I’d run a heat in the eighty-meter hurdles, and then I’d take one of my high jumps. Then I’d go over to the broad jump and take a turn at that. Then they’d be calling me to throw the javelin or put the eight-pound shot.” She proved her coach right, winning six of the eight events and scoring twice as many points as the entire second-place, 22-member team! The press called it “the most amazing series of performances ever accomplished by any individual, male or female, in track and field history.”

SETTING WORLD RECORDS

Fortunately for Babe, money was found to hold the 1932 Olympic Games. There, she set world records in the javelin throw and in the 80-meter hurdles. Her gold-medal performances helped raise the spirits of her Depression-weary country. This was just the beginning for the multi-talented Babe. Over the next 20 years, she excelled in every sport she tried, especially golf. Entering her first tournament in 1934, she went on to win every women’s golf title at least once. Only cancer could stop this unbeatable athlete, and it claimed her life in 1956.

Questions to Think About

1. How did organized sports help Babe Didrikson to become a star?
2. Why do you suppose Babe Didrikson Zaharias has been acclaimed the greatest woman athlete of the first half of the twentieth century?
3. **Drawing Conclusions** Why do you think sports stars often become so admired and loved by sports fans?