

## **Ladies on the Links; Audrey Faust Wallace and Virginia Pepp!**

Golf is a very democratic sport. Whether you are rich or poor, it is only your ability to execute the shot that matters. All your money cannot buy you a drive, an approach or a putt! For two contemporaries in the early 1920's, golf provided the bridge in a modern day "princess and the pauper". For Virginia Pepp and Audrey Faust their golfing ability was as unique as their lifestyles were different. These two ladies played matches that epitomized not just the best in ladies' golf, but some of the best golf played during this era.

From 1922 to 1932 they dominated the Ladies District Championship as no others ever would, each winning five times over an eleven year period. They would meet in the District finals 4 times, each winning twice, and in the semi-finals another three times!

As one of seven children of Irish-Polish descent, the Pepp family grew-up off Kingshighway in north St. Louis. Despite having two golf professional-brothers, Frank and Johnny Pepp, Virginia had little interest in golf growing up. But when they went into the service in 1917, thirteen-year-old Virginia picked-up a set of clubs from the garage and began to play at nearby Sherman Park and later in Forest Park. Self-taught, she quickly developed into an excellent player and in 1920 won the Women's City Championship and then in 1922, at age 17 she won her first district title, defeating a former District and State Champion Mrs. E. Lansing Ray.

While Virginia could ill afford the time or money to practice and play with the Country Club set, Audrey, the granddaughter of Anheuser-Busch founder Adolphus Busch, grew up with the grounds of St. Louis CC almost as her backyard. At age 18, in 1921 she fell under the tutelage of Stewart Maiden, the legendary mentor of Bobby Jones and Alex a Stirling, as he spent two seasons at St. Louis CC. She would be a semi-finalist that year as she began to show promise. As her game progressed, she steadily improved her standing until the breakthrough in 1924 when she captured the District crown with an upset victory over Virginia Pepp in a match that was considered at the time, as perhaps the best having played between two area women.

But instead of letting their rivalry create a barrier between them, they nurtured a friendship that would last for years. Audrey recognized early-on the talent that existed in Virginia, and such was her personality that she did what she could to assist her. To help Virginia work on her game, Audrey would send her car

into the city to bring her out to the club where she had the opportunity to sharpen her skills. This went on for years as they battled on the course and then shared a cool drink afterwards.

As a single lady, Virginia worked in the sporting goods' department of Scruggs, Vandervort and Barney to pay the bills and allow her to pursue her dreams. This enabled her to eventually join Midland Valley [the original Meadowbrook CC in Overland] in the late 20's and continue to compete in the District through 1930.

From 1922-1926 Virginia would dominate the game, winning 4 out of 5 years, losing only the 1924 finals to Audrey. Virginia would compete in the Women's Western, the Trans-Miss and the 1925 US Women's Amateur at St. Louis CC, as would Audrey. But with few tournaments open to women (the state Amateur was discontinued from 1922-1934) there was little else for Virginia to accomplish after she won her fifth crown in 1930.

In 1931, she would be swayed by Triple A pro Benny Richter to turn professional and assist him as an instructor at the Forest Park course. A lady giving lessons to men in 1931 was very unusual (not that it is all that common today) but what must be remembered is that there were no women pro's in the country in 1931! In all likelihood, Virginia was the first lady professional in the country, making the transition some three years before the more celebrated Helen Hicks, a former US Amateur Champion, took a salaried position.

Audrey did not achieve fame as quickly as Virginia, but once she began to win, only Virginia could stop her. Recognized as one of the longest drivers among the ladies, it was her mashie (5-iron) and putter that brought her most of her victories. Audrey married Mahlon Wallace in 1925 (she did not compete in 1925 due to her marriage), and as Audrey Wallace continued her winning ways. After winning the title in 1924, she would lose in the 1926 finals to Virginia, then win in 1927 and 1928, drop the finals in 1929 to Mrs. I.S. Hynes [the only time an "outsider" broke up the Pepp-Wallace title matches] and the 1930 crown once more to Virginia, before capturing the 1931 and 1932 titles. As you can see, she was virtually unbeatable in this period, reaching the finals seven consecutive years. Though 1932 would be her last victory, she would finish second in 1935 to the outstanding Sara Louise Guth.

Despite playing exhibitions with the likes of Ralph Guldahl, Johnny Bulla, Porky Oliver, Helen Hicks and Helen Detwiller, these did not offer the competitiveness Virginia sought. She quickly found that giving lessons actually left her little time to play, contrary to what she originally believed! She eventually

petitioned the USGA to reinstate her amateur status, but that would take until 1939. She continued to give lessons, usually in the evening at Eddie Held's range on Clayton Road, for many years, but she never seriously competed again. Years later, when asked by her niece to play a round with her, Virginia made a simple statement, "*Dear*" she began, "*I was very good. If I can't play the way I used to, I'd rather not go out and shoot 90.*"

Virginia and Audrey continued their friendship through the years and when Virginia's niece was born, she persuaded her sister to name her after her friend Audrey. Audrey Hatlan, former District President and Senior Champ is that niece!

Audrey would continue to compete, though as a lower level than her earlier days. On occasion an up-and-coming youngster looked past her to the next match and Audrey took advantage of this and showed them the true mettle of a champion, such as what happened in the 1950 District when she defeated the medalist in their opening match!

Audrey was also active in a variety of charities and other fund raising activities. During the 1940's Audrey was a volunteer to the Red Cross, a position she held through the 1980's. During the 1948 PGA at Norwood Hills, Audrey was among the number of volunteers who worked the scorers tent. When the USGA was searching for help with a new building for their headquarters and museum in 1950, Audrey, along with Paul Jamison and Hord Hardin, were area residents who served on the committee. The result of the fund-raiser is the present USGA home at Far Hills, New Jersey. Their charitable efforts were also felt locally. Audrey's husband, Mahlon, was a St. Louis County library board member and the County Library on Lindbergh is named in his honor!

Virginia retired in the 60's and played casual golf up until her death in 1977. Audrey took up skeet-shooting and was a Missouri champion. She also raised Labrador retrievers and showed-them throughout

***Records of Virginia Pepp & Audrey Faust Wallace  
in the Women's District***

<b>Year</b>	<b>Winner</b>	<b>Runner-Up</b>	<b>Site</b>
1922	Virginia Pepp	Mrs. E. Lansing Ray	Bellerive
1923	Virginia Pepp	Mrs. R. J. Kohn	Midland Valley
1924	Audrey Faust	Virginia Pepp	Glen Echo
1925	Virginia Pepp	Mrs. I.S. Hynes	St. Louis
1926	Virginia Pepp	Audrey Wallace	Sunset
1927	Audrey Wallace	Virginia Pepp	Algonquin
1928	Audrey Wallace	Mrs. I.S. Hynes	North Hills
1929	Mrs. I.S. Hynes	Audrey Wallace	Westwood
1930	Virginia Pepp	Audrey Wallace	St. Louis
1931	Audrey Wallace	Mrs. I.S. Hynes	Bellerive
1932	Audrey Wallace	Mrs. Harry Davis	Glen Echo
1935	Sara Guth	Audrey Wallace	Algonquin

the country. Rich Craden, long-time assistant there, remembers caddying for her. He remarked that she was not only an excellent player, but “one-in-a-million” as a person. Gracious and stylish, she continued to be active in events around St. Louis CC until her death in 1990.

While their friendship may have waned during the later years as they each found new interests outside of competitive golf, it was those wonderful dozen or so years that in spite of the intense competition on the course, allowed them to enjoy the friendship and camaraderie that is the cornerstone of amateur golf.