

Betty Jean Hulteng

Twenty years before Joanne Gunderson brought her golf game to Rhode Island from the Pacific Northwest, a young newlywed, Betty Jean (Rucker) Hulteng, moved to Rhode Island from Spokane, Washington. It was 1947 and her husband had become an editorial writer for the Providence Journal.

B.J. had already won the Spokane championship four times, the Pacific Northwest Golf Association championship twice, and the Washington State Women's Golf Association Championship. She burst onto the national scene in 1944 by the winning the Broadmoor Invitational, at the time the most prestigious women's championship other than the U.S. Women's Amateur.

In 1946 she advanced to the semi-finals of the inaugural U.S. Women's Open, losing to Patty Berg on the 35th hole. It was the only time it was contested at match play. She also lost in the U.S. Women's Amateur to the eventual champion, Babe Dedrickson Zaharias.

B.J. won six Rhode Island Women's Amateur Championships from 1948 to 1955. She might have won eight, but missed two championships to give birth to her son, Rob, and daughter, Karen. She also won the State Mixed four straight years and reached the quarterfinals of the U.S. Women's Amateur in 1949 and 1953.

In 1955 the Hultengs returned to the Northwest. B.J. played little competitive golf after that, but remained active as a volunteer in course rating, junior programs and championship administration. She was named to the Pacific Northwest Golf Hall of Fame in 1995.

Although Rhode Island barely had a chance to get to know her, she left an indelible mark on the history of Rhode Island golf.