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On this day: Babe Didrikson Zaharias

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NCR Today

On this day, 55 years ago, Babe Didrikson Zaharias died at the age of 45.

"'George, I ain't gonna die,' Babe told her husband just after midnight on September 27, 1956. But as the sun was rising over the Gulf of Mexico at 6:42 a.m., Babe Didrikson Zaharias passed away. George was by her side."

--*Wonder Girl: The Magnificent Sporting Life of Babe Didrikson Zaharias*, by Don Van Natta Jr., Little, Brown and Company, 2011, page 331. On the Amazon page is a short video. (And notice the enthusiastic Editorial Reviews.)

"At 10:33 a.m., President Eisenhower walked into a large room and took his place behind a stand of microphones to begin the ninety-sixth press conference of his Presidency.

"'Ladies and gentlemen,' the President told the 210 reporters assembled, 'I should like to take one minute to pay a tribute to Mrs. Zaharias, Babe Didrikson. She was a woman who, in her athletic career, certainly won the admiration of every person in the United States, all sports people all over the world, and in her gallant fight against cancer, she put up one of the kind of fights that inspired us all.

"'I think that every one of us feels sad that finally she had to lose this last one of all her battles.'" Page 332.

Mildred Didrikson was born on June 26, 1911. Don Van Natta Jr. wrote an article for the New York Times for the hundredth anniversary of her birth: "Babe Didrikson Zaharias's Legacy Fades."

Many have forgotten her. Many have never heard of her. The world is different now, thank God. With

girls and women in sports at every level, great athletes are no longer rarities.

(In grade school in the late 40s and early 50s, I always noticed how many stories in our readers were about boys and how few were about girls. And I noticed how many men and boys were in the stories and ads in Treasure Chest and how few women and girls. When they ran a six-page story of Babe Didrikson, I read it over and over. To see a woman athlete was something entirely new and entirely thrilling.)

Click here for another video and here for images.

Click here for the excellent Wikipedia article about Babe Didrikson Zaharias.

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