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Jessie Valentine: queen of golf 1958



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Born in Perth in 1915, Jessie Valentine (nee Anderson) was one of the dominant figures in women's golf for a period which spanned two decades from the mid 1930's to the mid 1950's.

A member of the Craigie Hill club in her home town, she was six times Scottish Ladies Champion and selected on seven occasions for the Great Britain and Ireland Curtis Cup team. This record would almost certainly have been even greater had the war not interrupted her career. In addition to winning national championships in France and New Zealand, she had already won the British Ladies title on two occasions prior to her success in 1958.

In 1937 (as Jessie Anderson) she beat Dorothy Park (daughter of the famous professional from Musselburgh, Willie Park jnr.) 6&4 in the final at Turnberry and eighteen years later defeated American Barbara Romack 7&6 at Portrush.

Having lost in the final in 1950 and again in the previous year at Gleneagles, Jessie went into the 1958 tournament, staged at Hunstanton Golf Club in Norfolk, with a remarkable record, and was rated as one of the favourites. She lived up to that high level of expectation by reaching a third final in four years.

In contrast to her two previous successes the 1958 win was a much tighter affair, with Valentine overcoming Elizabeth Park by a single hole in a closely contested match.

She was awarded the MBE in the 1959 New Years Honours list to recognise her achievement and the following year at the age of 45, she turned professional.

Valentine's successes paved the way for other Scottish Lady golfers, none more so than Belle Robertson from Southend, Argyll.

Born a quarter of a century later than Jessie Valentine, Isabella McCorkindale, as she then was, learned her golf at the local Dunaverty golf course before going on to a remarkable career.

Ironically she made her first appearance for Scotland in the 1958 Home Internationals - the same year as Jessie Valentine bowed out of the international scene.

She went on to record no fewer than seven Scottish title wins (in 1965, '66, '71, '72, '78, '80 and '86) surpassing Valentine's haul of six.

Having twice lost in the final (in 1965 and 1970) Robertson went some way to emulating Anderson's achievement when she won the British Ladies title in 1981 at The Conwy course in Caernarvonshire. The final against Wilma Aitken was a tight affair with Belle finally emerging as the victor at the second extra hole.

Her stroke play record was even more impressive as she lifted the Ladies British Amateur championship on three occasions, in 1971 and '72 and then again, after a thirteen year gap, at Formby

in 1985. She also won the Scottish Ladies Stroke Play title three times; the last success in 1986 marked her as the oldest ever winner at the age of 50.

Twice non-playing captain of the Great Britain and Ireland Curtis Cup team, Belle finally recorded a success as a player in 1986, when they beat the Americans by a resounding 13 points to 5. Including seven matches as a player in the bi-annual match, the victory came in her ninth appearance against the Americans.

Four times voted Scottish Sportswoman of the Year, she also won the “Women Golfer of the Year” title three times. Robertson received further acknowledgments of her contribution to golf firstly when she was awarded the MBE and then when she, together with Jessie Valentine, was named amongst the 50 inaugural members of the Scottish Sport Hall of Fame in 2002.



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