

# Major Tournament Golf

by **Patricia Loehr**

Of all golf competitions, the “majors” have, through the years, established themselves as significant contributors to the history of the sport of golf. Although there may have been a few years when they were not held, the majors have evolved from their many years of organizer support, player participation, and spectator interest. Each year brings renewed preparation and much anticipation for these events.

For men’s golf, some writers and historians of the sport have determined there are two eras of major tournaments. The first era was dominated more by amateur golfers. Then a second era established itself when professional golf rose to prominence.

Let’s take a step back to remember that before the now-major tournaments began, “rules of play” were created to govern them. In the early years of golf those who attempted to have competitions realized they needed some uniform rules and The Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers wrote

the first “articles and conditions” in 1744. The St. Andrews golfers (later the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews) made some revisions in 1754. The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews continues to make rules and revise existing rules for the sport (Figure 1).

Previously, I have written about The (British) Open Championship as the start of championship golf, thereby making it also the first-ever major (Figure 2). Instead of having separate competitions for professional and amateur golfers, a single tournament open to all began in 1861. Both amateur and professional golfers may qualify to play in open tournaments.

Wanting to resume an amateur-only championship, the Royal Liverpool Club (Figure 3), also known as Hoylake, initiated a British Amateur Championship in 1885. In the years that followed, the British Amateur was won by some of the famous golfers of their time including Horace Hutchinson



Figure 1. St. Andrews Golf Club meter stamp. The Royal and Ancient Golf Club resides in St. Andrews.



Figure 2. Day 1 cancellation for the 1970 British Open.



Figure 3. Royal Liverpool 2006 meter stamp. Royal Liverpool returned to hosting the Open Championship in 2006 having last hosted it in 1967.

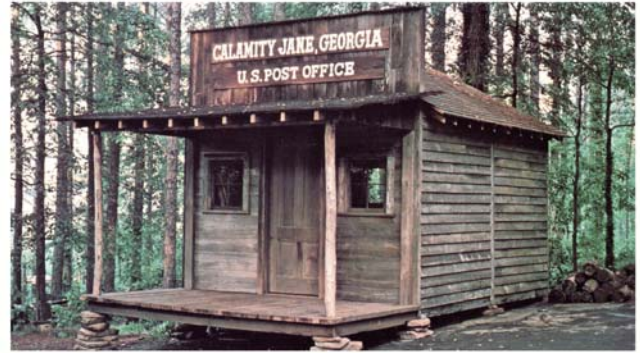


Figure 6. Picture postcard and cancellation for the 76th US Open in 1976. A replica post office station was constructed and named Calamity Jane in tribute to Bobby Jones and his famous Calamity Jane putter.



Figure 5. 1996 US Amateur Championship cancellation.



Figure 7. Meter stamp used in advance of the 1966 US Open (NBC currently has broadcast rights). Notice that this is a repeating number date sequence of 6-6-66.

(2-time winner), John Ball (8), and Harold Hilton (4). By the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth the British Amateur was well-established as a significant major golf event.

The United States Golf Association (USGA) was formed in 1894 (Figure 4). It organized the first United States Amateur and Open Championships in 1895 (Figures 5, 6, and 7).

Like the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, the USGA has become a rules-making organization for the sport.

The United States Open Championship (Figures 8 and 9) had its first golfing hero when, in 1913 at the age of twenty, amateur United States golfer Francis Ouimet won in a famous play-off with British professional golfers Harry Vardon and Ted Ray (Figure 10). Golf enjoyed an increase in popularity following Ouimet's historic win.

Already experienced at winning majors – nine

of them since 1923 – amateur golfer Bobby Jones decided to attempt to win four significant tournaments in 1930. Those competitions would be the Amateur and Open championships of both Great Britain and the United States. When he accomplished that great feat of winning those four tournaments in the same calendar year it became known as the Grand Slam of golf (Figure 11).

### Modern Grand Slam

The professional-era Grand Slam replaces the major amateur tournaments with the Masters Tournament and Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) Championship. The Masters now begins each major tournament year in April and the PGA held in August is the final major with the two Open Championships in-between.

When Bobby Jones retired from competitive golf after winning his Grand Slam he turned his attention to designing and building a golf course, the official opening of which occurred in January 1933.

The next year he hosted a get-together of many of his golfing friends and other accomplished golfers. He invited them to a tournament that was then known as the Augusta National Invitation Tournament. It has since become a world-famous sporting event known as The Masters (Figure 12 and postcard at top of article) and often described by the media as “a tradition like no other.”

The United States Professional Golfers’ Association (PGA) began in 1916 (Figure 13) and held its first championship the same year. Both the Masters and PGA tournaments are, unlike the Opens, by invitation only. Although the Masters may select amateur golfers who then receive an invitation, the PGA is a championship for professional golfers.

In the modern Grand Slam era there is some ambiguity for golfers who win the Bobby Jones era Grand Slam amateur events and then as professionals win the professional era events as to whether the amateur titles should be considered major wins.

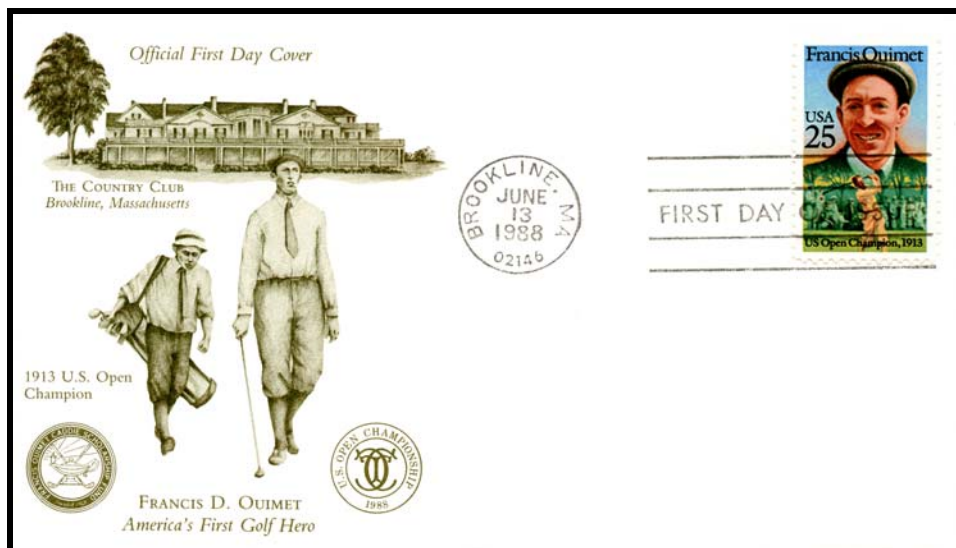


Figure 8. 1988 marked the 75th anniversary of the historic 1913 US Open Championship which was won by Francis Ouimet. A stamp was issued in his honor that same year.

### Women’s Golf Majors

Women’s major golf tournaments are somewhat more complicated to determine as they just have not had the longevity of the men’s majors. Although the British Ladies’ Golf Union began in 1893 and held the first Ladies’ Open Amateur Championship the same year, it was not until more than a century later that a women’s British tournament received designation as a major. That event, the Women’s British Open, became a major in 2001.

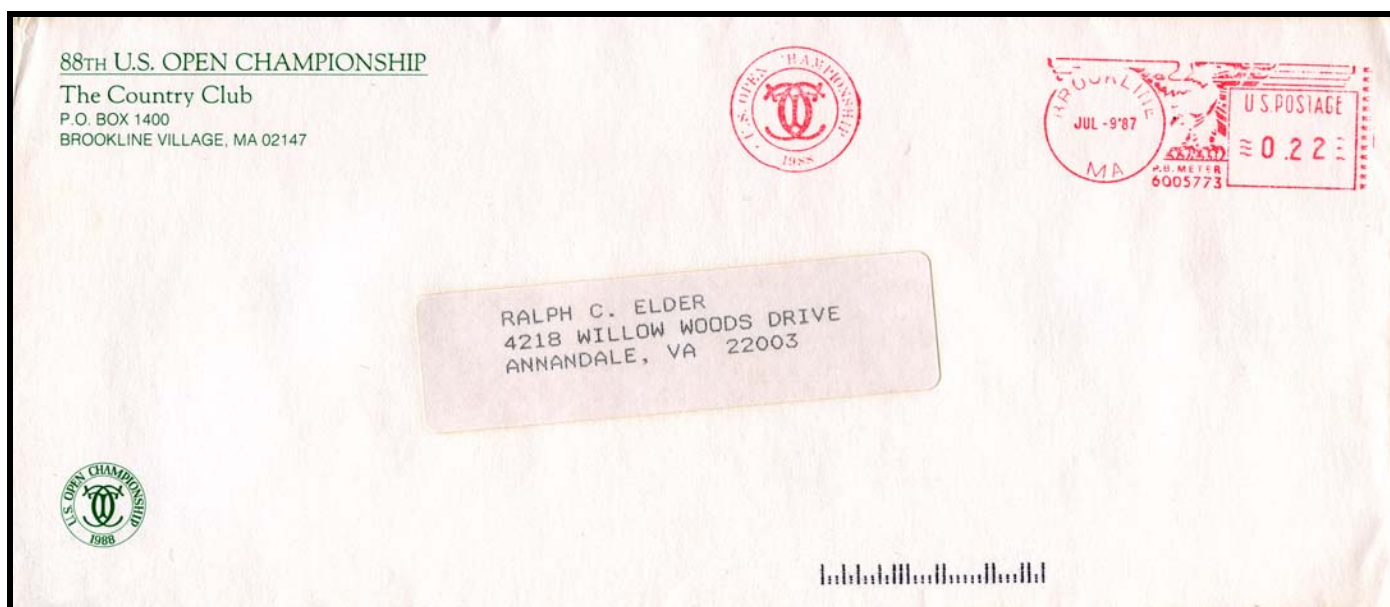


Figure 9. Meter stamp used in advance of the 1988 US Open Championship.

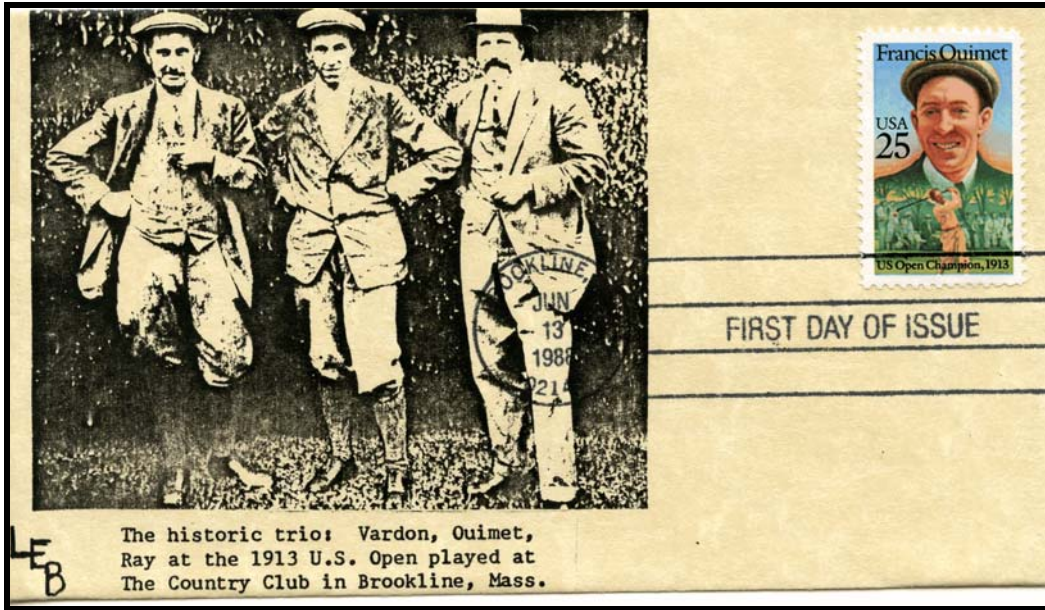


Figure 10. FDC with cachet of the three golfers who tied for the 1913 US Open Championship: Harry Vardon, Francis Ouimet, and Ted Ray.

Figure 11. 1981 US stamp honoring Bobby Jones issued at the World Golf Hall of Fame (then located at Pinehurst, NC). This cover combines commemorating the 50-year anniversary of completing the Grand Slam and First Day cancellation for the Bobby Jones stamp.



Figure 12. The first US postal issue honoring golf: an envelope in four styles with indicium depicting a golf club and an embossed golf ball. It was released at Augusta, Georgia in April 1977 during the Masters Tournament. FDC with cachet that has inset of the clubhouse at Augusta National.

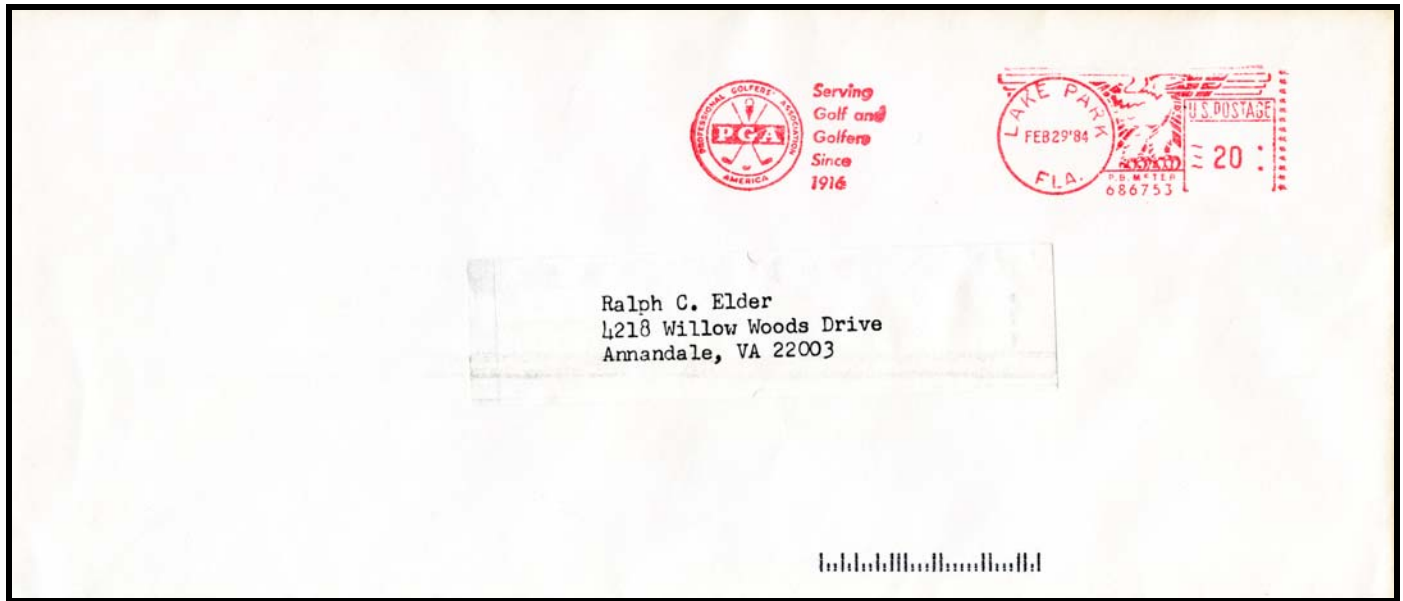


Figure 13. Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) meter stamp on leap year day in 1984.

First held in 1946, The United States Women's Open (Figure 14) is another major. Since 1953 it has been organized by the USGA.

Two early tournaments once described as majors began in the 1930s and have since then been discontinued. They are the Women's Western Open, last held in 1967, and the Titleholders Championship that ended after 1972. A popular tournament, The Titleholders was held at Augusta Country Club in Georgia. It is a golf course adjacent to Augusta National, the home course of The Masters.

The Ladies Professional Golfers Association (LPGA) began in 1950. It held its first championship in 1955 which, like the PGA's, is considered a major.

Mildred "Babe" Zaharias was a founding member of the LPGA having won numerous golf championships, some which are listed on a FDC for a 1981 stamp honoring her (Figure 15). During her career she also won four Women's Western Opens and three Titleholders which would have then been considered major wins. By the time the LPGA began having a championship, Zaharias was in declining health. She died in 1956.

The Du Maurier Classic, a Canadian tournament, began in 1973 and was designated a major in 1979.



Figure 14. 1992 US Women's Open cancellation.

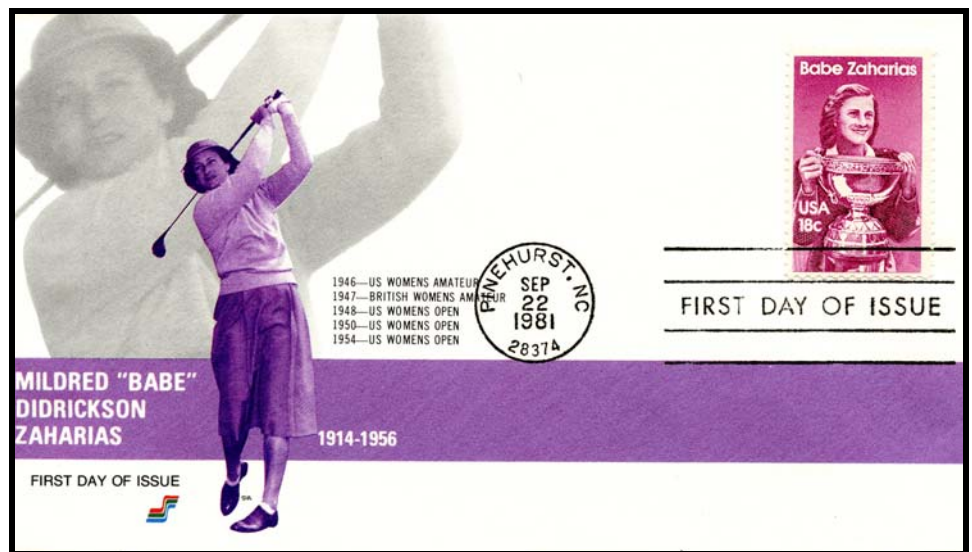


Figure 15. A stamp honoring Mildred "Babe" Zaharias was released at the same time in 1981 as the Bobby Jones stamp. The design was unveiled on June 4, 1980 during the LPGA Championship at Kings Island, Ohio.

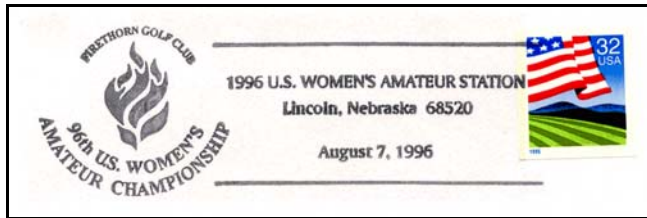


Figure 16. 1996 US Women's Amateur cancellation.

A significant tournament known as the Colgate-Dinah Shore Winner's Circle when it began in 1972 became a major in 1983. It is now known as the Kraft Nabisco Championship. Like the Masters Tournament it is held at the same course each year.

The oldest of all women's championships in the United States is the Women's Amateur Championship (Figure 16). It was one of the three original United States championships dating back to 1895; in the modern era of professional golf, however, it is not considered a major.

While the Bobby Jones era gave us Grand Slam golf events for men in the 1930s, that term did not apply to women's golf until some years after the LPGA began. Even then, in those early LPGA years, it is not clear how many or which tournaments were considered Grand Slam events. There is reference to the Du Maurier Classic as still being considered a major tournament. Another reference states that the Women's British Open replaced it in 2001. If that is the case, then the current four major Grand Slam tournaments in women's golf are: Women's British Open, U.S. Women's Open, LPGA Championship, and Kraft Nabisco Championship.

### A Game of Honor

In tournament golf, direct supervision of a referee, umpire, or knowledgeable rules-of-the-game official may not be available. Therefore, in both amateur and professional competitions,

players when aware of infractions of the rules might call a penalty upon themselves or they could ask for an official ruling from competition organizers.

This principle of honor also applies to determining amateur and professional status for participation in the majors as defined by the rules of golf. The rules allow for professional golfers who want to return to amateur status the option to apply to those who govern the sport for reinstatement of an amateur designation.

The commemorative covers in Figures 17 and 18 each have a tournament cachet. The first is titled "The Tournament" with a golf stamp from the recreational sports set of stamps of 1995. The other is a Bobby Jones stamp celebrating his "The Grand Slam of Golf." The cachets could be a view of any amateur, professional, open, or invitational tournament for either men or women. The scene could take place in any of the many countries of the world that have golf events.

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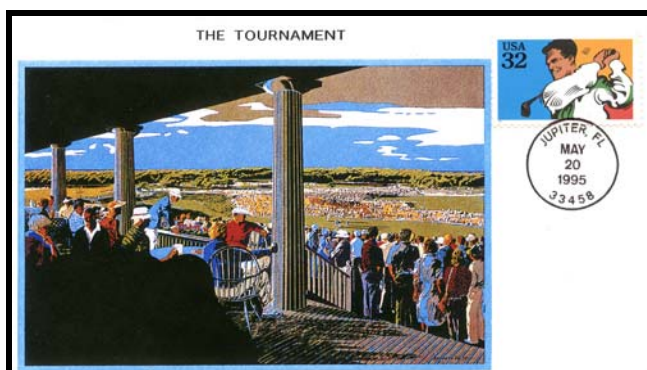


Figure 17. Commemorative cover with cachet of Shinnecock Hills Golf Club, Long Island, New York.



Figure 18. FDC for the Bobby Jones stamp from the 1998 Celebrate the Century Series, 1930s.