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**Jonn Baldwin, 1990 Metropolitan
Golf Association Player of the Year.**



RIPE FOR VICTORY

The Big Apple's John Baldwin was physically and mentally prepared to become 1990 Player of the Year

by Gene Cooney

Hope may spring eternal but golfers, by and large, are a realistic lot. They know that with each advancing year it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the standards of play they have set for themselves. They remember the long, straight drives of their youth, the callow decisions to go for every green that somehow inevitably paid off, the yip-less putts that always rolled true. Now, with the wisdom of age, as they decline to go for the pin and prepare to lay up instead, they can reflect philosophically on the game. They have learned that the best golf, like youth itself, is too often wasted on the young.

John Baldwin of the Meadow Brook Club, this year's Metropolitan Golf Association Player of the Year, might have been forgiven if he'd approached the 1990 season in this frame of mind. The 45-year-old managing director and national sales manager of municipal securities at First Boston Corporation was, in the 1960s, a bona fide phenom. In 1967, just out of college, he enjoyed six of the best weeks a local golfer ever had, winning in rapid succession the Long Island, New York State and Metropolitan Amateur Championships. After a job-related move to Chicago in the '70s, he returned to the Met Area in 1980 and quickly re-established his reputation

as one of the region's elite amateurs. Whatever the tournament, you could count on seeing Baldwin's name high on the list of contenders. For almost the entire decade, he placed among the top ten point-earners in Player of the Year honors, finishing in the top five in two of the last three years.

Yet this year, Baldwin had to battle the feeling that his best days as a golfer might have been behind him. It had been more than three years since he had won a tournament, the 1987 Richardson Memorial, "and you start wondering if you are ever going to win another one," he said. "I never doubted my game was in there somewhere but things had to go right to get it out. I had to do the right thing at the right time and get a little lucky when it was needed. And that's just how it turned out."

If that sounds like an overly modest and far too simplistic assessment of his season, rest assured it is. Noth-

THE TOP 10 FOR 1990

1. John Baldwin	Meadow Brook	875
2. Jeff Thomas	Plainfield West	727
3. Michael Brannan	Patterson	635
4. George Zahringer III	Stanwich	495
5. Jerry Courville Jr.	Shorehaven	355
6. Malcolm Smith	Huntington Crescent	350
7. Jon Doppelt	Brae Burn	313
8. Bobby Fisher Jr.	Bowling Green	280
9. Richard Siderowf	Century	270
10. Jonathan Jame	Engineers	240

ing came easy to John Baldwin in 1990. Winning the Met Amateur Championship, including a semi-final victory over his personal nemesis George Zahringer III in a battle for Wall Street bragging rights, may have been the highlight of his year. Yet it was his solid play throughout the season and his ability to bounce back from disappointment that ultimately earned him enough points to be named Player of the Year.

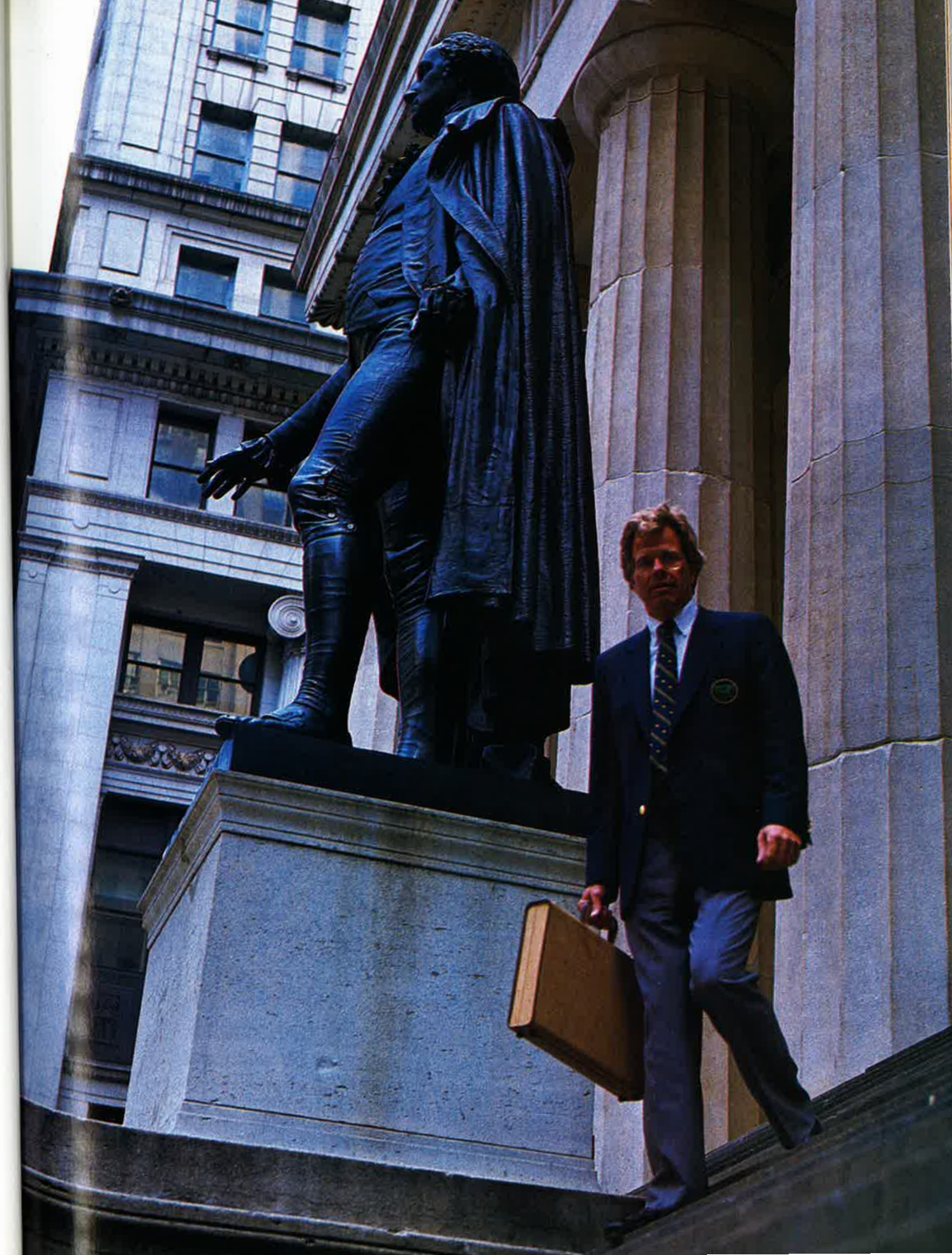
As Baldwin put it, "The thing that made me most proud this season was the consistency of my play. In past years, I may have had two or three good tournaments. The rest of the time I would be back in the pack. I disappeared. This year, I did well in just about every tournament I entered."

Baldwin served notice from the start that he would be a force to be reckoned with this season by challenging in each of the year's early amateur tests, including the Richardson, Havemeyer, Travis and Hochster Memorials. By the time The Ike Championship at Upper Montclair came around in late June, Baldwin's play had made him one of the pre-tournament favorites. After the morning round on the final day, he and Jerry Courville Jr. were tied for the lead with one-under-par 143s. Playing head-to-head against Courville, Baldwin established a two-stroke advantage with nine holes to play. Then disaster struck on the back nine. Baldwin posted four bogeys and a double to stagger home with a 79. Courville's 77 was enough for the win.

"There's no question The Ike was the biggest disappointment of the year for me," Baldwin said. "That was literally a case of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory." With the Met Amateur coming up, it was gut check time.

Baldwin's preparation for the season had been part physical and part mental and he needed both aspects to recover from The Ike. "I had paid a little more attention this year to getting in shape for the season. I went

John Baldwin focuses on another kind of green power during office hours on Wall Street.



"I TRIED TO HIT THE GROUND RUNNING IN THE SPRING INSTEAD OF PLAYING MYSELF INTO SHAPE. THE PREPARATION HELPED AS THE SEASON WENT ON."

on a diet in the winter and lost a few pounds and that helped. And I worked a little harder at the exercise shop during the off-season. I tried to hit the ground running in the spring instead of playing myself into shape. The preparation helped as the season went on."

Mentally, he said, "I had a little bit more focus this year. I was part of early conversations about the French/American Challenge Cup. That provided a fabulous incentive to shoot for a spot on the American team, and I had that on my mind all summer."

(As a member of the MGA team playing in Paris, and later against an Irish team in the Metedeconk International Challenge Cup, Baldwin was undefeated in team and individual contests, winning five and halving two. He was the leading MGA point winner in both events.)

Ironically, the vicissitudes of the financial markets may also have contributed to his mental fortitude, he said. "Wall Street is very skittish these days, which might have helped with my focus. Business has really slowed down. There's not as much to do and it's not as profitable. I know I was really keyed up to play competitive golf this year. It was great to have that kind of outlet."

It helps too when the results are so favorable. At the Met Amateur at Piping Rock, Baldwin started with a straightforward six-and-five win over Rick Southwick of Gardiner's Bay in the opening round. Then he ran into Pat Fogarty of the Links at Lido. With the match tied up at the final hole, Baldwin sank a 25-foot birdie putt to advance. "Any time you sink a putt like that, you're lucky," Baldwin said. "But my play around the greens was the most important improvement for me this year. I changed my putting style last summer, using more of a shoulder rotational approach instead of just the hands and wrists, subscribing to the theory of using the big muscles instead of the small ones. It felt good, and I eventually got to the point where I was able to roll the ball consistently."

The semis featured the showdown with five-time Amateur Champion Zahringer, a man who seemingly

had Baldwin's number. "The (two-and-one) win over George was a big psychological boost for me," Baldwin said. "I think I had faced him five times in the past and lost every time. I felt really fortunate to still be playing."

The final, pitting Baldwin against R.J. Nakashian, a 22-year-old from

Glen Cove Golf Club, was anything but anti-climactic. Baldwin's strong play in the morning round had staked him to a four-hole lead which he quickly lengthened to five on the first hole in the afternoon. But Nakashian's outstanding play closed the gap and he pulled to within one hole with eight

to play. In the growing gallery around this time, there started to be a lot of talk about stamina and how experience is no match for the vigor of youth. Baldwin kept his own counsel. He played the last six holes in one-under-par and closed out the match on the 34th hole. The 23 years between his

Met Amateur titles set a new record for the championship.

Although he was first exposed to the game caddying at Plandome Country Club where, as a member, he would later win the junior club championship, Baldwin says he really learned the game at the University of North

Carolina. "That was the first time I was playing with top-notch competition on a regular basis." He was obviously a quick study, winning the ACC championship in his junior year.

After graduation, he enrolled at the University of Miami with one eye on an MBA and the other on the professional golf Tour. "Miami's not a bad place to go if you are thinking about golf," he allows. Upon earning his degree, he promptly matriculated at the PGA Qualifying School and played his way into touring privileges.

"I lasted about a year and a half on the Tour. I think I made eight cuts and won maybe \$5,000. Obviously, it wasn't the most positive experience. A lot of people told me I should give it a chance, let my talent develop and so on. But I knew in my heart it was not the kind of lifestyle I wanted. I wasn't dedicated enough to eat, sleep, drink and practice golf all the time. So basically I decided to get out, regain my amateur status and join the real world. I started here at First Boston as a trainee in 1972. Nineteen years later, I'm still here."

Baldwin is that modern rarity, a golfer who is a year-round New York City resident. It takes some doing, but from April to October, he averages between three and four rounds a week, often playing 36 holes a day on weekends. But his commitment to the game extends beyond playing. For the last four years, he has served on the MGA's Executive Committee, currently holding the position of treasurer. It is, he acknowledges, a way of giving something back to the game, but one that caused him second thoughts. "When I joined, I made it clear I wanted to remain a competitive player and they assured me there would be no conflict of interest."

There could be, however, a conflict in scheduling. When John Baldwin the player rose to accept the championship trophy at this year's Met Amateur, the designated presenter was John Baldwin, MGA committee man. A stand-in had to be found. □

Gene Cooney is a contributing editor of The Met Golfer. He lives in Norwalk, Conn.



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