

Humble Hero

Jerry Courville Jr. doesn't care much for accolades. Alan Bastable reports, but that hasn't stopped him from earning his fourth MGA Player of the Year Award

Jerry Courville Jr. has never embraced the spotlight, though he has often found himself directly under it. It's an awkward predicament for Courville, but an unavoidable one, too. This past season the 41-year-old member of Shorehaven Country Club in East Norwalk, Connecticut, was named the MGA Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year. This is the fourth time in six years that Courville has won the Award—it is named after his father, who died of cancer in 1997—and the second time he's claimed it in consecutive years.

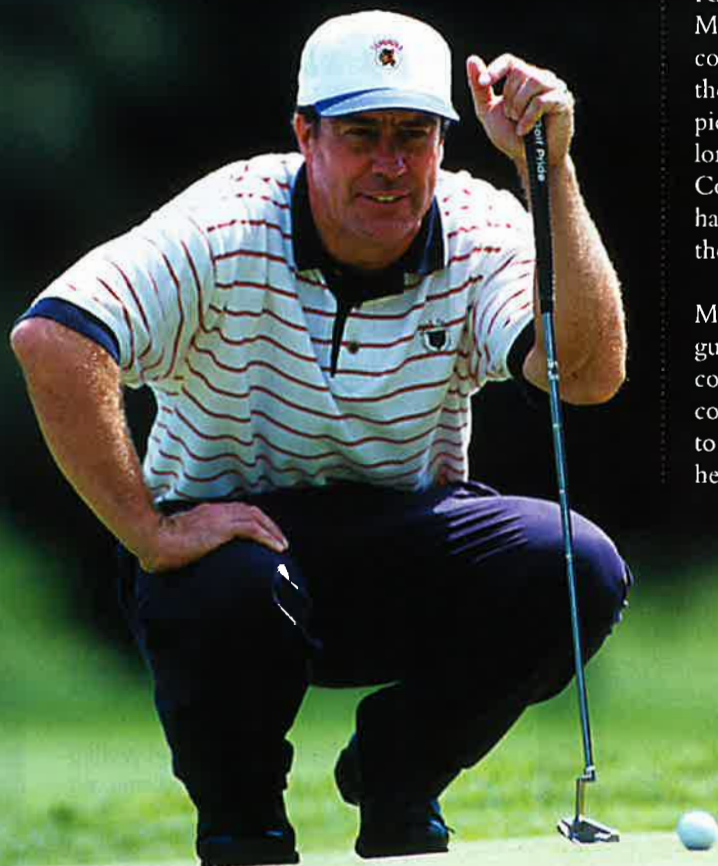
Courville has enjoyed a remarkable run in that six-year stretch. In addition to the Player of the Year awards, he won the U.S. Mid-Amateur (1995), represented the

U.S. on two Walker Cup teams (1995 and '97) and one World Amateur team (1996), and prevailed at three Met Amateurs (1995, '97 and '98) and one Ike (1997). Despite his success, Courville has never begun a season with his eye on the Player of the Year Award, nor does he consider it as the year unfolds. "That's the furthest thing from my mind," he says. Instead he sets a more general goal. "I want to play well enough in each tournament to give myself a chance to win," he says. "There's too many good players out there to set your mind on a specific prize."

Courville began his year by reaching the quarterfinals of the Travis Memorial, at Garden City Golf Club, and finishing tied for fifth in the Hochster Memorial, at Quaker Ridge Golf Club. Then came the Ike Championship, the MGA's stroke-play "major," accompanied by what has become almost a rite of summer—Courville's first move up the Player of the Year standings. The three-time Ike champion finished tied for third this time around, yet still was a long way behind Ken Macdonald of Upper Montclair Country Club in New Jersey. The 23-year-old Macdonald had successfully defended his 1999 Ike title and had claimed the New Jersey State Amateur earlier that month.

Courville's next assignment was the Met Open at Mountain Ridge Country Club in New Jersey, in mid-August (he missed the Met Amateur because of a tournament conflict). The long-hitting Courville said he felt his game coming on that week, but after leading with just four holes to play, he ended up second behind Mike Gilmore Jr., the head pro at Wheatley Hills Golf Club on Long Island. The

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second place finish and low amateur honors did gain Courville a significant boost (350 points) in the standings.

The U.S. Amateur visited Baltusrol Country Club in New Jersey the following week. "I was playing well at the time," says Courville—and he could have added that he plays particularly well in match play. His strength is his consistency; he makes few mistakes. This not only puts pressure on his opponents but gives him an edge under difficult conditions. "I've got a better chance to win on a tougher course," he says. After comfortably advancing through on-site stroke play qualifying, he was taken to the final hole only once en route to victory in his first three matches. In the quarter-finals, however, he faced a tenacious James Driscoll, the eventual runner-up, who nipped Courville 1-up.

Courville had now assumed a commanding lead in the standings. He traveled to the Homestead in Virginia for the

Connecticut finished fourth and Marc Turnesa of Rockville Links on Long Island, the reigning Long Island Amateur champion, finished fifth.

Given Courville's accomplishments, there's little doubt that he could be a successful tour professional. In truth, he still could, but the idea has never appealed to him. "When you play for money," Courville reasons, "you lose your love for the game."

So what does motivate Courville? The competition, he says. And as he prepares for 2001, his motivation will be fueled by one of the world's ultimate amateur competitions, the Walker Cup. "I'd love to play in one more," he says. If he can play well enough to stay under that spotlight, he might just do that. 

For the 2000 MGA Player of the Year Honorary Roll, see "Scoreboard" on page 10.

Courville already has set his sights on the 2001 Walker Cup. "I'd love to play in one more," he says.

U.S. Mid-Amateur in September, but lost in the second round. He then wrapped up his season with a second-place finish at the Boff Invitational in early October raising his point total to 1,058, nearly 300 points better than Macdonald, who finished second. George Zahringer III, the 47-year-old member of Deepdale Golf Club on Long Island (and an eight-time Player of the Year), finished third. Austin Eaton of Sterling Farms Golf Club in