

# THE MIET GOLFER<sup>®</sup>

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## PLAYER OF THE YEAR

JERRY COURVILLE JR.  
EARNS A PLACE  
IN THE SUN

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# JERRY'S DREAM YEAR

*To the surprise of not very many, Jerry Courville Jr. won the MGA Player of the Year Award by a record margin, just one of numerous top honors for the Shorehaven golfer in 1995*

by John Steinbreder  
Contributing Editor

Jerry Courville Jr. is stretched out on a couch in his Norwalk, CT, condominium, his feet on a coffee table, his eyes toward the television. The 36-year-old with reddish-brown hair, clad in gray T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers, is watching clips of a basketball game on ESPN and starts to talk about how much he enjoys the sport. "I run one of the local leagues in the winter," he says at one point. "I'll occasionally shoot a few hoops with the boys, but I don't play much any more. Mostly I just open and close the gym."

Now hockey scores flash on the screen. "I like hockey, too," he continues. "I played it all the time when I was a kid. Hockey, basketball, baseball—I've always enjoyed a lot of sports."

Finally he mentions golf—the reason this writer is visiting. "I think I was nine years old when I first walked a course," Courville Jr. says. "That's when I began caddying for my father at Shorehaven [still their home club]. I started playing the next year and, by the time I was 13, I was practicing almost every day, usually after I'd finished carrying. I'd play a few holes or

hit some chips and putts as I waited for my father to pick me up."

Courville Jr., who works in the central engineering division of Pitney Bowes, turns back to the television; now he's watching college football. He seems just like any other guy who grew up playing sports but now lives out his athletic fantasies from a seat in front of a television set.

But this guy is different. In 1995, Courville Jr. was one of the best amateur golfers in the country, and had one of the greatest seasons a Met Area amateur has ever enjoyed. He was one of only three amateurs to make the final field for the U.S. Open at Shinnecock Hills. He was medalist in the U.S. Amateur at Newport, Rhode Island. He won the U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship (for amateurs aged 25 and older) in Maryland—earning an invitation to the 1996 Masters—and, perhaps most significant of all, he was named to the U.S. Walker Cup team.

Locally, he won the Met Amateur,

**The spoils of success, from far right: Courville with the U.S. Mid-Amateur trophy, the Met Amateur trophy, and (front row, left) with his Walker Cup teammates as they're greeted in Britain by an unexpected host.**

the New York City Amateur, and the Boff Memorial, tied for second in the Ike, and finished third (and was low amateur) in the Met Open. Add that up and you'll understand why Courville was a runaway winner of the MGA's Player of the Year Award. His 1,702 points beat the existing record, set by Jeff Thomas last year, by almost 400 points. (Thomas' 1,300 points this year left him only 11 points shy of his own

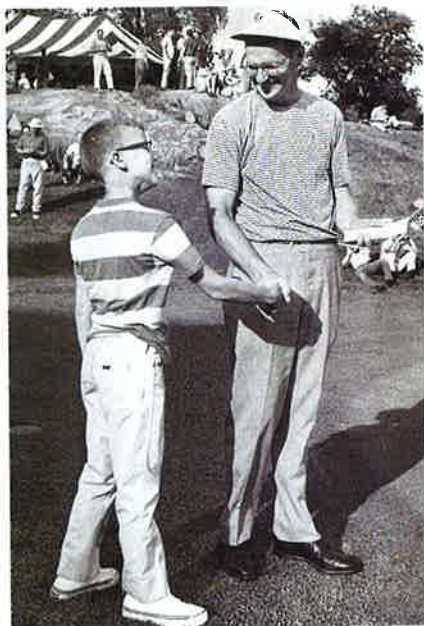




**“YOU COULD TELL A LONG TIME AGO THAT JERRY HAD THE TALENT, THE RAW STRENGTH, AND THE GOOD TOUCH TO BECOME A TOP PLAYER,” SAYS FORMER MGA PRESIDENT JOHN BALDWIN, HIMSELF A TWO-TIME PLAYER OF THE YEAR.**

record but he finished a distant second in the standings).

Remarkable as it was, his success did not surprise too many observers. For one thing, they point out, he has the pedigree of a champion; his father, 61-year-old Jerry Sr., has won just about every Met Area title in existence, including six Ike Championships, the 1967 Met Open as an amateur, and two Met Amateurs. Further, Courville Jr. has long showed that he has an extra-



ordinary knack for the game. He won the 1975 Connecticut State Junior match-play title and was named Connecticut Player of the Year in 1981, at the ripe old age of 22. “You could tell back then that Jerry had the talent, the raw strength, and the good touch to become a top player,” says former MGA President John Baldwin, himself a two-time Player of the Year.

So why the 14-year gap between being Connecticut’s and the Met Area’s top player? “I played a lot of golf through high school and into my early 20s, but I never took it very seriously,” Courville Jr. explains. “And I sort of lost my desire to compete after I won the Connecticut Amateur in 1981. I backed off for a while.”

That “while” would last until 1989—the year he married his wife Janet—but Courville Jr. made quite an impression upon his return, reaching the semi-finals of the U.S. Amateur in ’89 and capturing the first of two consecutive Ike titles the following year. He continued to win thereafter, including the Hochster and the Crump Cup, the latter played at Pine Valley, as

**Father and son have been constant companions on the golf course, from the early days (left) to winning three Ike team competitions (below).**

well as three Ike team titles with his father. He also played on the MGA squad that competed against the Golf Union of Ireland in 1990 and ’92, and against the Ligue de Paris in each of the FRED’s Cup matches from 1990-95. He is the only player to have been selected for every MGA team in these competitions.

Still, some wonder why such success was so long in coming. “Maybe he needed time to learn to play and live in the shadow of Jerry Sr.,” Baldwin says. “It can’t be easy following in the footsteps of such a successful father, and just by having the Courville name, Jerry Jr. was expected to win. That must have been a burden.”

Jerry Sr. concurs. “It was tough at times,” he says, “because people expected him to do as well as I did, if not better. But in other ways, it also helped. Jerry always had someone to talk to about his game and his swing. I like to think I always was there for him.”

Today the son smiles when he thinks back to his dream season—but can’t explain exactly why it turned out this well. “I don’t know what I did differently,” he says. “I drove the ball a little better, and I eliminated some three-putts. But I don’t think I’m hitting it much better than in years past. I just happen to be winning more.”

Ken Bakst, another top Met Area



# THERE ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT THE FATHER'S BATTLE WITH CANCER HAS INSPIRED HIS SON TO LIFT HIS GAME TO NEW HEIGHTS.

amateur, agrees. "Jerry may have had his best season in terms of titles," Bakst says, "but he's done well every year since he started competing again. It's not like he's started shooting scores he's never shot before. He was more consistent in 1995 and played well from start to finish."

Adds Courville Sr., "I think confidence was the difference. He's been playing well for a while, but last season he had a stronger, more positive attitude. And he didn't make the little mistakes."

Another factor worth considering is that Courville Sr. is in the midst of a fight with cancer, and there are those who believe that the father's battle has inspired the son to lift his game to new heights. "Jerry and his father are very close," says Joe Sommers, another top area golfer and a friend of the Courvilles. "I think his performances have helped Jerry's father in his struggle—and I think Jerry knew they would."

"Sure, my father's health has



**Jerry and Janet have been married since 1989, the same year that Courville "returned" to competition.**

been a factor," Courville Jr. says. "I could see how much fun he was having watching me this year. In fact, I think he got a bigger thrill out of it than I did."

Courville Jr. is hard-pressed to pick one or two highlights from his year. "I did four things last season that I had never thought I'd be capable of doing," he says. "I qualified for the Open and didn't embarrass myself, I was medalist at the

Amateur, I was named to the Walker Cup team, and I won the Mid-Amateur." But wasn't there a particular shot that stood out? "Probably the putt I made to close out the Mid-Amateur," he says. "It was a tough match [with Warren Sye of Canada]. I was three down after six, two down after 12 and was even going into 18 [unlike the U.S. Amateur, the Mid-Amateur final is scheduled for 18 and not 36 holes]. I had an 18-footer for birdie but the ball slipped a foot and a half past. Sye had a 15-footer that would have won the whole thing. But he ran his putt six feet

## PILING UP POINTS

How Jerry Courville Jr. racked up a record amount of Player-of-the-Year points

Event	Performance	Points
Travis	Semi-finalist	50
NYC Amateur	Won	100
U.S. Open	Made final field	150
Hochster	3rd	60
Ike	Tied for 2nd	137
Connecticut Open	Third-low amateur	30
Met Amateur	Won	275
U.S. Amateur	Qualified for Match-Play	125
U.S. Amateur (bonus)	On-Site Medalist	75
Met Open	3rd and low amateur	250
U.S. Mid-Amateur	Won	350
Boff Memorial	Won	100
<b>Total</b>		<b>1702</b>

# HE DOESN'T KEEP A CASE CRAMMED WITH TROPHIES—WHAT'S NOT IN THE CHINA CLOSET IS ON DISPLAY AT SHOREHAVEN—AND HE DOESN'T TALK MUCH ABOUT HIS SUCCESS.

by and then missed the comebacker. I knew as I stood over my second putt that I was going to The Masters if I made it. And I couldn't believe it when the ball dropped."

So Courville Jr. is Augusta-bound, but little different because of it. "Jerry doesn't brag about himself or act like he's special," says Sommers. In fact, when asked after his Met Amateur victory about the possibility of his being selected for the Walker Cup team, Courville Jr. replied, "Whether I'm picked or not, whether I won here or not, I still have to go to work on Monday morning." There's something very basic yet profound in his golf philosophy.

"He really enjoys the game and doesn't think he's too good to play with high-handicappers," continues Sommers. "The past few winters we've gone to a tournament in Hartford called the Iceberg Open; it's a terrific event with players of all abilities. And Jerry enjoys that as much as anything

else he does in golf." Adds Bakst, "Jerry's the sort of person you pull for. I know I did all last year. I kept telling him, 'You have a chance to accomplish some great things, and you deserve it.' Later he asked me a couple of times if I really thought he deserved it and I said he did, as much as anybody."

Back on the couch in his condo, Courville Jr. seems much like the regular guy that Bakst and Sommers describe. He doesn't keep a case crammed with trophies—what's not in the china closet is on display at Shorehaven—and he doesn't talk a lot about his success. He really does look more like a guy who opens and closes a south Norwalk gym than the golfer who played better than maybe any amateur in America in 1995.

But come April, Courville Jr. will travel to Augusta, Georgia, to play in The Masters—and even his closest friends admit that there is nothing at all regular about that. ■