

# Never Too Late

Despite taking up golf in his 20s, **Darin Goldstein** mastered it well enough to win the MGA Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year Award

**M**ost top competitors have grown up playing golf since they could walk. Darin Goldstein is not one of them. The 37-year-old “stumbled” upon the game in the mid-2000s thanks to friends who were playing, and quickly found that he had a knack for it. In the years since, Goldstein has paired his natural athleticism with a keen desire to improve. He has stood among the region’s best in recent years, and in 2018 the Deepdale golfer authored his most consistent season yet in capturing the MGA Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year Award.

“Golf wasn’t my first, or really second, third, fourth, fifth sport,” says Goldstein, who was part of an ACC Tournament-winning tennis team at Duke University in 2003. “I wasn’t playing competitive tennis anymore and golf represented a challenge. It started out just as something to do, but once you hit the center of the club one time, you get hooked.”

The process of improving and the physical and mental challenge captivated Goldstein. Before long others urged him to compete in tournaments. “Maybe in 2012 the idea of winning an event one day crossed my mind,” said Goldstein. “Before then, it never did cross my mind. I was just trying to qualify for events.”

His first breakthrough came in 2013, as he made birdie on three of his final four holes to win the LIGA Mid-Am at Cold Spring Country Club.

“It came much faster than I could have ever imagined,” says Goldstein. “All of a sudden, my name was next to the names that I had been seeing on the top of leaderboards.”

The win helped him place 63rd in the MGA points listing that year. He climbed to 26th in 2014, and as he played in more events—and secured more wins—he finished fifth, third, and second from 2015–17. That left only one place to go in 2018.

A trip to U.S. Open sectional qualifying, a win in the Eagle Oaks Invitational, and cuts made at both the Long Island Open and New York State Open served as highlights for Goldstein early in the year. Then in August he earned his highest single-event point total of the season in the 103rd Met Open Championship Presented by Callaway.

“I knew it was a golf course that I could play well at,” says Goldstein of Wykagyl Country Club, where he qualified for the U.S. Amateur in 2016. “I had just gotten back from the U.S. Amateur at Pebble Beach. I finished strong at Pebble [he failed to qualify for match play but cut six strokes from

his score between the first and second rounds] and was sort of able to build on it and I played solid golf all week.” At Wykagyl he finished in a tie for eighth overall and for third low amateur.

While Goldstein entered the season with the modest goal of finishing inside the Honor Roll—Top 10 in the points listing—he began to reassess after the Met Open, recognizing that he had a number of events remaining and an opportunity to climb to the top.

He was part of a three-way playoff as defending champion at the MGA Mid-Am, falling short on the first extra hole, but Goldstein bounced back to win the Bergen County Amateur, then advanced to match play at the U.S. Mid-Amateur in Charlotte. What he termed a “fluke” back injury forced him to concede his Round of 64 match, but immediate therapy and treatment allowed him to close out the season, even though he didn’t feel 100 percent.

The busy schedule continued with a trip to Paris for the French-American Challenge and a quick return for the Nassau Invitational, where Goldstein advanced to the quarterfinals. Though reigning honoree James Nicholas of Westchester Country Club won the event and jumped to the top of the points race, Goldstein added a runner-up finish in the Richardson Memorial to carry a 44-point edge into the season-ending Sarazen Invitational at Fresh Meadow Country Club.

Nicholas made the most of his attempt to chase down Goldstein by logging a second-place finish, doing so as the two played together in the final round. But Goldstein’s tie for sixth—his sixth top-10 finish in a stroke play event for the year—was enough to hold off Nicholas’s charge. He finished the season with 864.33 points to edge Nicholas by just 4.33 points, the smallest final margin in the 43-year history of the award.

“Every shot mattered because every stroke mattered relative to your finish,” says Goldstein, reflecting on the season’s tight race. “Every spot—one shot, one putt, one par, one birdie—made a difference where the points fell at the end of the year.”

Goldstein credits consistency and a heightened focus on decision-making and game management as important factors in his climb to the top. “When you don’t hit it 300 yards off the tee, you have to know your game, be honest with your game—honest with the shots that you have and don’t have—and manage it the best you can to shoot the best score you can,” he says. “For the most part, every time I teed it up I put myself in a position to have a plausible chance at being there at the end.”

Trusty caddie and friend Kyle Moffitt was a vital piece of Goldstein’s success on the course. “I know for sure that I wouldn’t have been able to have the season I had and the growth as a golfer without him on the bag,” says Goldstein. “He’s been there the entire time and has taught me a ton.”

At 37, Goldstein is the oldest player to claim the award since a 54-year-old George Zahringer won in 2007. The last seven award winners have ranged from 18 to 25



Metropolitan Golf Association 2018 Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year Honor Roll			
1	Darin Goldstein	Deepdale Golf Club	864
2	James Nicholas	Westchester Country Club	860
3	Christian Cavaliere	Mahopac Golf and Beach Club	720
4	Jack Wall	Manasquan River Golf Club	623
5	Brad Tilley	Sleepy Hollow Country Club	580
6	Thomas LaMorte	Haworth Country Club	548
7	Christopher Gotterup	Rumson Country Club	505
8	Jay Linn Card	Gardiner's Bay Country Club	478
9	Jonathan Jeter	Nassau Players Club	433
10	Trevor Randolph	Arcola Country Club	400

years old – all ages younger than that at which Goldstein even began to play the game. “It’s a different animal when you have a job, a family,” says Goldstein, who works in real estate. Flexible working hours are

helpful, but he knows what he considers to be the real key: “A very understanding wife. As the season went along and the race got tighter and tighter, she happily shouldered more of the workload at home to give me

the time to get out and practice and go to all the tournaments.”

Her support and his persistence paid off in a season that was unimaginable a decade ago. ■