



Player of the Year



Meurer Image

Staten Island's Pete Meurer caps a solid career by winning the MGA Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year Award | BY JEANNE MCCOOEY

SOMETIMES, GOOD GUYS DO finish first.

After several years of respectable finishes on the MGA Player of the Year Honor Roll, Pete Meurer, one of the Met Area's most personable and popular players, finally found him-

self on top in the race for the 2004 MGA Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year Award. The retired NYC firefighter and lifetime publiX player from Staten Island, N.Y., climbed to the head of the MGA standings with a trio of early season wins and continued his consistent play throughout the year. His total of

739 points led nine-time Player of the Year George Zahringer of Deepdale and Sleepy Hollow's Brad Tilley who finished in a tie for second place with 495 points each. Pete is only the third Public Links Player to take MGA Player of the Year honors since the award was created in 1976, and the first since Jeff Thomas in 1996.

Pete's route to the title started with victories in the Richardson Memorial, New York City Amateur, and Rockland County Amateur, followed by top 10 finishes in seven other events and a trip to the U.S. Mid Amateur. But if you ask Pete, he'll tell you it really began about 30 years ago when he and his friends starting sneaking onto Silver Lake Golf Course in Staten Island—the borough that also honed the games of former Tour players Jim Albus and Bill Britton. Formal lessons were scarce, but Pete does remember getting plenty of help from the “old timers” at the club who weren't shy about dispensing advice. “Some of these guys were great putters and chippers,” Pete recalls. “I learned a lot about touch just by watching them. One of them also gave me some of the best advice I've ever gotten. His name was Pete Grasso. He would watch me play, and when I would have a bad day or get angry he would always tell me to never get down on myself and remember to have fun. I always felt better after talking to him and I always remembered that.”

That advice served Pete well on the golf course, and on the job. In his 19 years as one of New York's Bravest, first in downtown Manhattan and later on Staten Island, he saw some pretty awful stuff. “You gotta be able to come back and shake it off,” said Pete. “Otherwise, you could never do your job.” Golf was one way Pete and the guys at the firehouse learned to cope with the pressure and they formed a regular team that traveled to different courses each week. “We were pretty competitive, but it was mostly about having fun.”

That attitude rescued him more than
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once and never more than when his career was abruptly halted six years ago after a fall from a ladder during a routine training exercise shattered his hand. Therapy and surgery restored some of the damage but not enough to return to the physical demands of fighting fires. "That was a tough time," notes Pete, "But I remember thinking, if I could just get well enough to play golf I would be OK. It was something I really enjoyed."

Maybe it was Grasso's advice, or maybe it was a toughness born of his many years in the fire department, but within two years Pete had worked his way all the way back to competitive condition. He quickly made his mark. In 2000 alone he qualified on site at the British Amateur and played in the U.S. Amateur, the U.S. Mid Amateur, and the U.S. Public Links. He also won the 2002 MGA/MetLife Public Links Championship and played on several

MGA International teams, gaining a reputation in the process as one of the best ambassadors for Met Area golf. Frequent teammate Allan Small said of Meurer, "Pete's outgoing nature and decidedly New York style are always a hit. Even in Paris, everyone wants to hang out with the guy from Staten Island."

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Sidelined for a second time in 2003 with rotator cuff surgery, the 46-year-old Meurer once again worked his way back to the competitive circuit. "I think coming back last time really gave me the confidence that I could recover again. I thought, what the hell, I'll work at it and see what happens." He joined a gym over the winter and began to work out, and the results speak for themselves.

Pete's win this year was all the sweeter because of the caliber of players taking aim at the title, including Zahringer, Tilley, Met Amateur winner Andrew Svoboda—who went all the way to the quarterfinals of the U.S. Amateur at Winged Foot—and young guns Tyler Hall and Nick Cook. (The last three entered the pro ranks before The Met Open in August.) The Honor Roll also included players Mike Reardon of Tuxedo, Patrick Pierson of Miniseongo and Fairmount's Craig Smith and Allan Small (Full results on page 53).

By Meurer's own admission, the goal this year was just to make the top 10 on the Player of the Year Honor Roll—it does, after all, come with some nice exemptions. But finding himself at the top of that list he says is "beyond my wildest dreams." But ask any of the legions of Pete Meurer's fans and they'll tell you, that's just where he should be. ■

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