

The High Life

Mike Miller dominated the Met Area in 2011, winning MGA Player of the Year honors in convincing fashion **BY BILLY CONDON**



The last year has been a learning experience for Mike Miller, on and off the golf course. After earning his first MGA victory at the Met Junior last summer, he headed off to what was expected to be a smooth transition to college life at Penn State. However, things turned out differently.

When Miller made the decision to leave Penn State midway through his freshman year, he turned to his family for support. A family, by the way, that is not only made up of Millers, but Turnesas. It is a family tree of golfing royalty.

The son of Knollwood head professional Bobby Miller, Mike was followed this summer by uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends who walked the fairways of the Met Area to support the 19-year-old with the flowing locks under the Titleist hat. They witnessed him have the best season of his career, including wins at the Met Amateur and Brae Burn Invitational, and finish atop the Polo Golf MGA Player of the Year Points list.

When he is honored with the 2011 MGA Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year Award at the MGA's Annual Meeting and Dinner on December 7, it will be that same support group cheering him on louder than anyone else in the crowded room. Miller now joins an impressive roster of past winners of the MGA Player of the Year Award.

"There are some great players on that list," said Miller. "To be a part of it is definitely special and something I'll never forget."

For the affable and enthusiastic Miller, golf has been an outlet this year while he decides what his next steps will be academically and athletically. His focus, work ethic, and competitive nature fueled his big year, and he had extra motivation as well.

"I thought I had a lot to prove this summer," he said. "Not really to anyone else, but to myself that I made the right choice [to leave Penn State]. I'm walking away from this season with a lot of confidence, but I know there is a lot to be done. Especially if I want to get to the next level."

Miller's game was sharp from the get-go. He tied for third at the New York City Amateur at LaTourette Golf Course on Staten Island in May, and followed that up with a semifinal finish at the Westchester Amateur in early June, where he was defeated by 14-year-old Cameron Young of Sleepy Hollow in the semifinals. Miller, however, would avenge the loss later in the season.

The next stop for the busy teenager was Quaker Ridge Golf Club in Scarsdale, N.Y., site of the 2010 Met Amateur, for the prestigious Hochster Memorial, where he recorded a second-place finish. He carried the momentum from the Hochster into the Brae Burn Invitational, played a week later, and won by three strokes. This gave Miller a total of 300 Player of the Year points, and put him ahead of early-season leader Kevin McSorley of Monmouth Golfing, who won the NJSGA Mid-Amateur in May.



In golf, it never hurts to have a little luck on your side, and as the summer's schedule would have it, the Westchester Open was played at Brae Burn Country Club. Miller couldn't have scripted it better.

Competing against a talented group of professionals and amateurs, Miller nearly won the championship but was edged out at the end by the talented professional Greg Bisconti of Saint Andrew's. Miller finished tied for second as well as the low amateur, earning him 152.5 Player of the Year points, his highest single-event total of the season up to that point.

Nearly two months to the day after their hard-fought match at the WGA Amateur, Miller and Young met again in the quarterfinals of the 109th Met Amateur at the Piping Rock Club in Locust Valley, N.Y. This time it was Miller's turn to come out on top.

He earned a 2-up win over Young to advance for the first time in his career to the Met Amateur semifinals, where he played 2010 MGA/MetLife Boys champion Matthew Lowe and defeated him by a 2 & 1 margin.

In the 36-hole final match of the Met Amateur, Miller faced fellow 19-year-old Sam Bernstein of Century. Through 22 holes, it looked like Miller had lost his magic touch, as he fell 3-down to Bernstein, a Yale University sophomore who was having an outstanding week at the Met Amateur in his own right. But Miller put on a display of golf that won't soon be forgotten, carding five birdies and two eagles in a nine-hole stretch to come roaring back. He squared the match after 26 holes, and closed it out, 3 & 1, on the 35th hole.

After earning 275 points from his most prestigious career win, Miller rounded out his summer by qualifying for the U.S. Amateur at Erin Hills in Wisconsin and placing second at the Bergen County Amateur.

As Miller's schedule was winding down, Mike Stamberger's was picking up. The 2003 Met Amateur champion qualified for the U.S. Mid-Amateur in Texas and made a terrific run to the quarterfinals. That earned the 39-year-old New Jersey native 200 points and vaulted him into the top five on the Polo Golf Standings. Stamberger's third-place finish at the MGA Mid-Amateur moved him up even farther, to third place.

Highlights of Miller's season included teaming with fellow teenage star Cameron Young (below, left) at the Carey Cup and winning the Met Amateur with his dad on hand.

2011 MGA Player of the Year Honor Roll

Pos.	Name	Club	Points
1	Mike Miller	Knollwood	973
2	Max Buckley	Westchester	673
3	Mike Stamberger	Spring Lake	658
4	Joe Saladino	Huntington	586
5	Sam Bernstein	Century	580
6	Niall Handley	Essex Fells	490
7	Ryan McCormick	Suburban	462
8	Cameron Young	Sleepy Hollow	365
9	Anthony Aloï	MGA eClub-N.J.	355
10	Brian Komline	Black Oak	320

While it was still mathematically possible for Stamberger to catch Miller, the youngster would soon put the race out of reach. Miller tied for third at the Boff Invitational and was runner-up at the Nassau Invitational, a loss which came at the hands of the defending champion and two-time MGA Player of the Year, Joe Saladino of Huntington.

Having already clinched the Player of the Year honor, Miller, along with Saladino, played a key role in the MGA's victory at the Carey Cup Matches against the Golfing Union of Ireland at Bethpage in October. Once again, Miller's family was cheering him on as he played 2011 Walker Cupper Alan Dunbar in a singles match.

This offseason, Mike Miller will reflect on 2011 while analyzing how he can continue to improve. In the meantime, he can take pride in knowing that he was the year's best amateur golfer in the Met Area. ■

