



"I'm a 914 Guy"

Jimmy Roberts, 2016 Distinguished Service Award winner, on his home turf at Westchester Country Club.

Westchester's golf ambassador and favorite son is the MGA's 2016 Distinguished Service Award winner.

Photograph by Madelyn Vetrano

Jimmy Roberts wants to know something. "Couldn't they have found someone better than me for this?" This is the MGA's highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award. "This is really flattering. I'm shocked. I'm still kind of shaking my head when I think about it."

For Jeffrey Holzschuh, former MGA President and chair of the DSA committee, there's no head-shaking necessary. "When we think about somebody who would be a great recipient for the Award," he says, "it's somebody who has a strong

attachment to the region, has a very clear passion for golf, who is willing to give back to the game and is recognized and respected for what they've done for the game. That's the kind of quality person we want this Award to be associated with, and that's

Jimmy in a nutshell."

To the nation that has gotten to know Roberts through his thoughtful reports and commentaries, first on ESPN and then on NBC and Golf Channel, he is a lineal descendant of the essayists of sports in general and golf in particular, men like Jack Whitaker and Heywood Hale Broun. To the Met Area, though, he's our Jimmy, a Westchester boy and man through and through.

"I love it here," he says, considering the streets of Rye beyond a coffee-house window. "I've been to every state in the union except Alaska, I've been to a lot of countries, and everywhere I go in the world the first thought when I get off the plane or out of the car is that I can't help but compare it to where I live. I'm not going to say Rome or Paris or Athens don't compare to White Plains or Rye, but there are very few places I go in the United States where I think, I'd like to live here instead of where I live."

He grew up caddying at Fenway, Westchester Hills, Ridgeway,

and even occasionally at Westchester Country Club, where he is now a member. His parents belonged to Bel Aire, which later became the Canyon Club and is now Brynwood. "I'm a 914 guy," he says. "I learned to play golf at a club in the Met Area, I caddied at clubs in the Met Area, I belong to clubs in the Met Area. I've had close friends who have been administrators and professionals here. I can't imagine myself living anywhere else."

His column has appeared in the pages of *The Met Golfer* since 2003, bringing readers the probing intelligence and historical perspective that characterize his on-air work. "I think in my soul I'm a journalist," he says. "My definition of journalism is a fair and equal consideration of the story. I work in TV and it's a business that is complicated, because we have partnerships. Sometimes you're in a position where you have to ask questions that make people angry, but that is what journalists do. I like to think that I'm a storyteller with a conscience."

"I was always taught that the people you work for are the people sitting in their living room and watching, and your job is to ask the questions they might be interested in hearing the answers to. My goal is to ask what needs to be asked and hopefully do it in a way that's respected. It's a complicated dance we dance out there."

He learned his steps by observing some of the best from behind the scenes in the production end of television: Howard Cosell, Keith Jackson, Al Michaels, Dick Schaap. "They are all very literate people who invented a paradigm," he says. "I'm a derivative. I don't mean I modeled myself after them; I just like telling stories. There's a lot of noise out there these days, and I think I've grown to appreciate something which is a little more measured."

He wasn't one of those ambitious youngsters determined to get in front of a camera no matter what, but when the opportunity presented itself, he realized he could write for himself as well as he wrote for others. He never expected to develop a specialty in golf (golf and the Olympics, as detailed in Hank Gola's profile of Roberts, "Our Man in Rio," in the June/July 2016 issue of *The Met Golfer*), but the game flows so naturally through his conversation that it's hard to imagine things could have turned out otherwise.

"I love the game, but sooner or later my back is going to tap me on the shoulder and say, 'Okay, that's enough,'" he says. "I figure I've been a single-digit handicap, I've broken 80, I've pretty much accomplished everything that at some point I thought I might need to accomplish in order to check off the boxes so I wouldn't be annoyed."

Regardless of whether he continues to play or not – and the betting here is that he'll give up his clubs when they pry his cold dead fingers from his grip – he will surely remain a valuable and important part of the golf scene in the Met Area. He is generous with his time on behalf of the MGA, hosting dinners and emceeing, doing voice-overs for the organization's caddie-training video, assisting with the Met PGA Section's Educational Forum – "His answer has always been 'yes' whenever we've asked for his help," says MGA Executive Director Jay Mottola. He also serves on the Board of Directors of the Met Golf Writers Association.

But most importantly, he will undoubtedly continue as Westchester's leading golf ambassador to the world at large, representing and reflecting the values of the game he learned while working and playing on our golf courses. For this, and for his continuing contributions as an oasis of civilized commentary in a sports landscape increasingly populated by those who shout the loudest, the MGA is proud to honor Jimmy Roberts with its 2016 Distinguished Service Award, and could not have found anyone better. ■