

Player of the Year

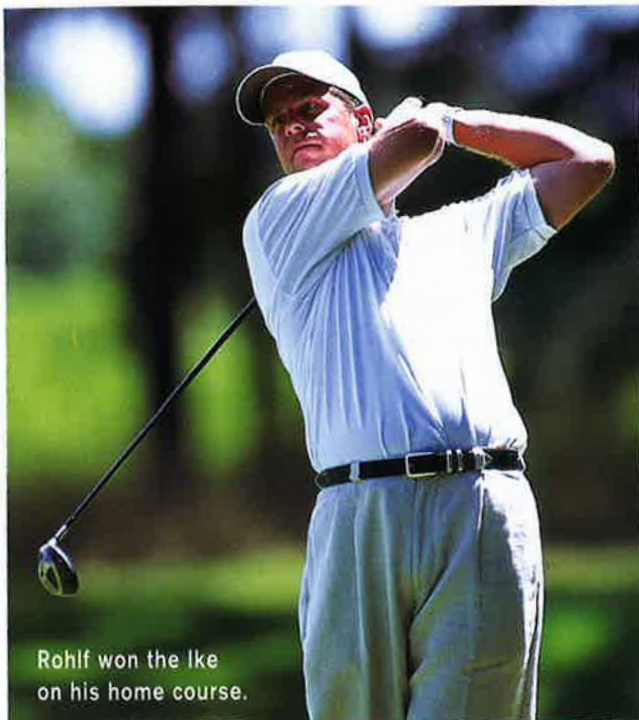
Off and Running

Greg Rohlf capitalized on stellar play early in the season, Jeanne McCooney reports, to craft his big, breakthrough year

Players as competitive as Greg Rohlf don't like to finish second in anything. But Rohlf, the MGA Jerry Courville St. Player of the Year for 1998, thinks finishing second to Jerry Courville Jr. in last year's race might actually have been good for him. "In 1997," says the 33-year-old member of Wykagyl Country Club in New Rochelle, "I had a great year and won several events, but the spotlight was clearly on Jerry, who had a spectacular year. Yet, coming that close to winning the Player of the Year title really built my confidence and mentally prepared me for 1998. I was more comfortable in the lead spot this year and was more relaxed. I learned how to win."

No one who saw Rohlf play this year ever doubted that he was mentally and physically prepared to win his first Player of the Year title. The former mini-tour professional started the season with a semifinal finish in the Richardson Memorial, qualified locally for the U.S. Open, made the quarterfinals of the Travis, and finished third in the New York City Amateur. He jumped ahead in the Player of the Year point standings in early June with his second consecutive Westchester Amateur title and a runner-up finish in the Hochster Memorial, and closed the month with a victory in the Ike at Wykagyl. "The Ike," notes Rohlf, "was the highlight of my golf season. It was Wykagyl's centennial and it meant a lot to win my first MGA title with friends and members looking on."

Rohlf was a model of consistency throughout July and August, qualifying for the U.S. Amateur, finishing second low amateur in the New York State Open, and being on-site medalist in the Met Amateur. His point standings took another big leap after the Met Open, when he came within three



strokes of an upset victory. Though disappointed, the points he won as low amateur plus the points for finishing tied for fourth virtually clinched him the Player of the Year title.

Rohlf closed the season by qualifying on site at the U.S. Mid-Amateur and finished tied for third in the Boff Memorial for a total of 1,257 points (see "Scoreboard" for final standings).

Rohlf, who was married in September, gives a lot of credit to then-fiance Nadjia. "The stability and support that she gave me made a big difference," he says. "I was more relaxed and more focused, and that allowed me to play better." Rohlf also cred-

its his father, owner of Rohlf's Stained and Leaded Glass Studio, where Greg works. "He always encouraged me to compete and gives me the time off to do it," Rohlf says.

Giving Rohlf a run for his money was Courville, the reigning Player of the Year. Among his other achievements, Courville retained his Met Amateur title and won a second Hochster Memorial. Other top performers included collegian Ken Macdonald of Upper Montclair, who won the Havemeyer Memorial and became the youngest player to win the New Jersey State Open; Edward Gibstein of Engineers who won the Richardson and Nassau Invitationals, and Joe Sommers of Winged Foot who claimed the New York City Amateur title.

Rohlf is enjoying his time in the spotlight. "Three years ago, no one knew who I was," he says, "but now I'm recognized and that's gratifying. I also get invitations to all kinds of local, national, and international events."

But he's not letting it go to his head. "I don't think I'm the best amateur golfer in the Met Area," he says. "I just had the best year."