



Milestone Year

Joe Saladino put together a brilliant 2010 campaign and earned his second MGA Player of the Year title

BY BILLY CONDON

Joe Saladino achieved numerous golf milestones in 2010. On August 25, he played in his first match at the U.S. Amateur. On September 29, he played in the Round of 16 at the U.S. Mid-Amateur. On October 3, he shot a course-record 63 en route to winning his final tournament of the year. And on December 1, he will be honored with the MGA Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year Award—his second title in three years.

The 2010 Polo Golf MGA Player of the Year Race was as competitive—if not more—than any in history, as three players set themselves apart from the talented pool of Met Area amateur golfers. Along with Saladino, Evan

Beirne of Bethpage and Mike Ballo Jr. of Woodway had streaks of red-hot play, as Beirne racked up wins at the 108th Met Amateur and the prestigious Hochster Memorial, both held at Quaker Ridge Golf Club in Scarsdale, N.Y.

ROBERT WALKER/USGA

Ballo repeated as Ike champion at Metropolis and also won the Rockland County Amateur at Spook Rock.

The three share a common bond, as they are all members of the St. John's University golf family, and it didn't take long before it was a Red Storm whirlwind at the top of the Polo Golf MGA Player of the Year Point Standings.

"Over the summer I had the opportunity to play in tournaments with Evan and Mike, and it is great to be able to see the success the program has continued to have with great guys," said Saladino, who graduated in 2002.

Saladino, who turned 30 in March and plays out of Huntington Country Club, made an effort to focus on his short game heading into this season. "As I get older and my responsibilities grow outside of golf, I made sure I balanced practice—especially on my short game—with proper nutrition and working out." This disciplined routine showed immediate dividends, as he earned his first victory of the year at the Havemeyer Invitational at Southward Ho in May, only days after celebrating his one-year anniversary with wife, Sarah.

Saladino was in the winner's circle again in early August, this time at the Mittelmark Invitational at Fenway. The Mittelmark put Saladino in second place in the points standings behind Ballo, who had occupied the top spot for most of the summer following his win at the Ike. At the end of August, another big shift occurred, as Beirne won the Met Amateur at Quaker Ridge and then tied for third



and finished as low amateur at the Met Open at Bethpage Black, finishes that vaulted him into first place over Saladino and Ballo.

At the U.S. Amateur, which took place the same week as the Met Open, Saladino made match play for the first time and earned an important 125 MGA Player of the Year points. He followed that up with a win at the Bergen County Amateur on September 12, and from that point on he kicked his game into high gear. Two weeks later at the U.S. Mid-Amateur, with a support group of friends and family cheering him on, Saladino thrilled the hometown gallery. He made it to match play, won two matches, and rolled into the Round of 16, locking up another 160 points.

It was now the home stretch, and Saladino had his eyes fixed on the finish line. With one event left on his schedule, the Nassau Invitational, he blitzed the course in the opening round with a 63—a new course record—for yet another milestone. "The 63 is something I will remember for a long time. I love the course at Nassau and that round definitely stands out in a season full of highlights."

Saladino can take pride in his achievements before turning his focus to 2011: "To win [MGA Player of the Year] once was a great thrill, and to do it again gives me a lot of confidence. But golf is a game of current events, so you find yourself looking ahead to next season. It's definitely something to enjoy right now and it's nice to sum up the season with the words 'MGA Player of the Year.'" ■

Saladino had a strong run at the U.S. Mid-Amateur at Atlantic (above), and worked hard on his putting all year long.