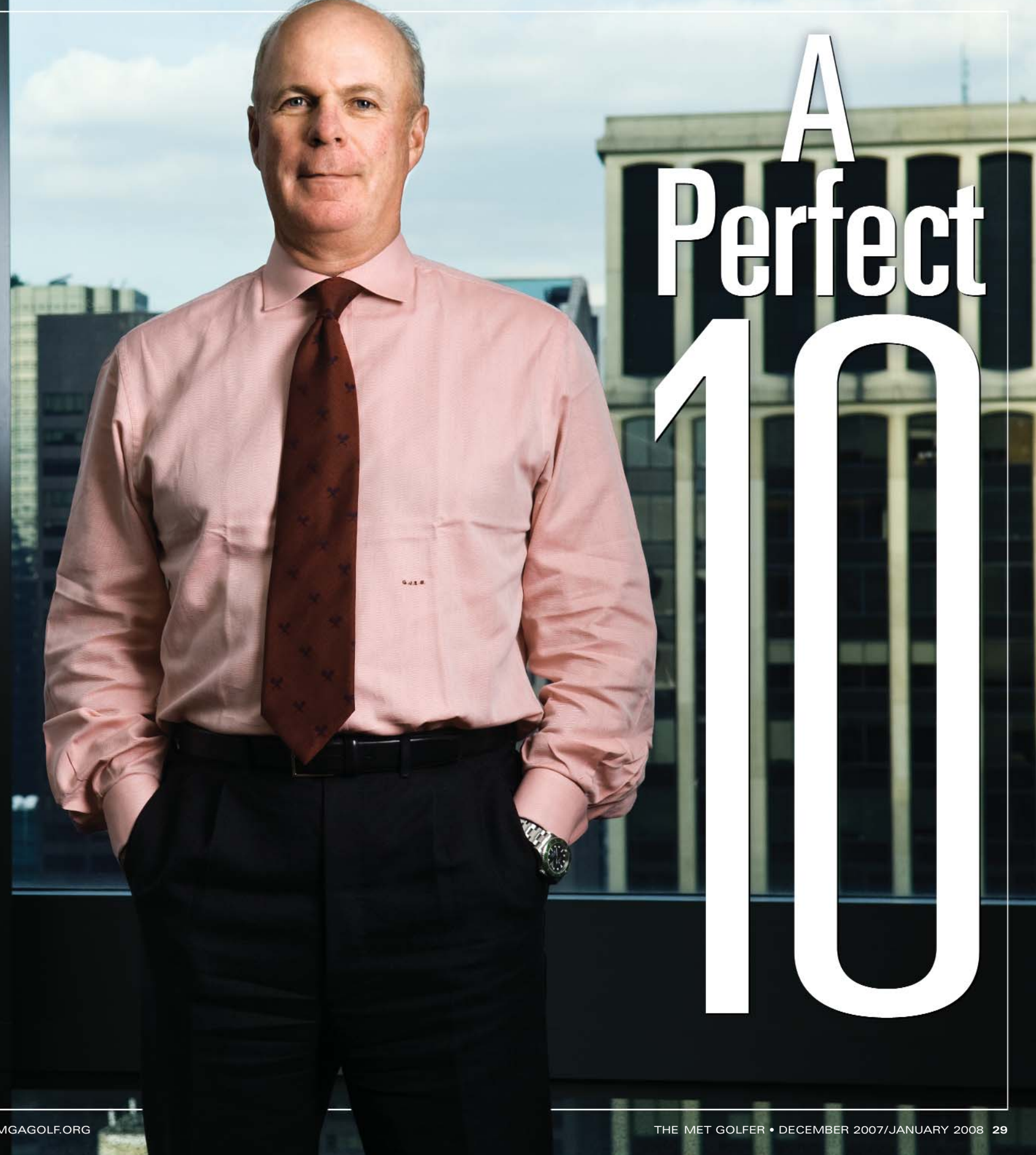


**He's the MGA
Player of the Year yet
again, and success for
George Zahringer III
comes off the course
as well. He seems
to be enjoying it more
than ever before**

BY KEN BARON

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF WEINER

Not long ago local golf legend George Zahringer III was asked what it would mean to him to win the MGA Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year Award in 2007. "It would mean," the 54-year-old New York City native said with a smile, "that you can put a fork in me. I'm done!" The problem with this heartfelt comment is that Zahringer has been pronounced "done" before and declared past his prime frequently, only to re-emerge as Player of the Year — he won his first in 1979 and this year marks his 10th such honor, five more than any golfer in MGA history — that the silver drawer is darn near out of forks.



A Perfect 10



Zahringer is all smiles while being interviewed by the local media after his 1985 Met Open triumph.

Zahringer's player of the year titles have nothing to do with being popular or respected by his peers, though he is. The award is not voted upon, but rather is a merit-based point system that encompasses some 70 tournaments. Zahringer has won it so often because, quite frankly, he's been beating all comers since the 1970s. Jon Doppelt, a longtime Met Area competitor and four-time MGA International team member, sums up Zahringer's dominance this way: "George would consistently shoot in the 60s at tournaments when no one else was breaking 75."

Zahringer's record could give a statistician heart palpitations. Locally, he has won some 35 Met Area events, including 11 MGA major titles (five Ike Championships, five Met Amateurs, and one Met Open — more than anyone in MGA history. That's enough hardware

to strain even the sturdiest mantel. In 1985, he was the first player ever to win the Met Amateur and Met Open in the same year.

On a national scale, he became the oldest U.S. Mid-Amateur champion ever with his win at age 49 at The Stanwich Club in 2002. That victory earned him a trip to the 2003 Masters, where he holds the record as the oldest first-time invitee. He was a member of the 2003 U.S. Walker Cup Team. He has twice been low amateur in the U.S. Senior Open (2007 & '05) and made an impressive run to the Round of 16 at the 2007 U.S. Amateur, losing to eventual champion Colt Knost.

Zahringer's success calls to mind David Feherty's comment that, in the future, golf's record book will be just one word: "Tiger." When it comes to the Met Area amateurs, the one word in our record book could very well

be "George." Sure, other names will vie for consideration — "Jerry" (Courville Sr.) and, earlier, "Walter" (Travis), come to mind — but a strong case can and has been made that George Zahringer III is the best amateur ever to come out of this area (*see sidebar, below*). You certainly wouldn't start a bar fight with that comment.

Yet while much is known about the man as a golfer, his private side has remained something of a secret, with many folks gleanig little more than what is typically detailed in a one-line bio: "Zahringer is an investment broker at Bear, Stearns & Company, and plays out of Deepdale Golf Club in Manhasset, N.Y., and National Golf Links in Southampton, N.Y." Some people, for example, may think that Zahringer's day job is merely the accepted lot of a guy who didn't have the game or the guts to turn pro. On the contrary, the Wall Street world is a true passion for Zahringer, on par with golf. Sure, he is happy to talk about his on-course success — "the Walker Cup was very special for me. I was 50, by far the oldest player on the team, and the experience representing your country was just tremendous" — but ask him a business question and his eyes light up.

"This [2008] is an election year," he says, "and it's going to be a cautious period with continued uncertainty. Plus, we're not done with the credit crunch just yet," he adds, and then launches into a treatise about sub-prime issues and institutional lending practices. In fact, even when he explains why he hasn't yet bought a weekend house outside the city (he and second wife, Anne, and their two young children live on the Upper East Side), the investment banker in him takes center stage. "I've been a little bit negatively biased on real estate prices," he says, "and so we've rented the last several summers on Long Island."

Incredibly, Zahringer is almost as much an imposing figure on Wall Street as he is on the first tee. He is a senior managing director at Bear Stearns, and his midtown office, with a commanding view, is populated with a junior partner and two supporting staff members. It also is chockablock with golf memorabilia, including one of his seven(!) USGA medals; a picture of him with his Walker Cup teammates, Casey Wittenberg, Hunter Mahan, Ryan Moore, and Bill Haas among them; a Masters flag and photo of him with former

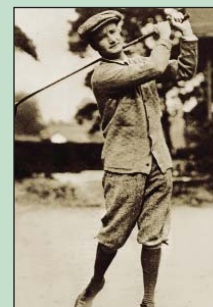


Tale of the Tape: Is Zahringer the Best?

So is George Zahringer III the best amateur to ever come out of the Met Area? That's kind of like trying to debate the slugging prowess of Alex Rodriguez and Babe Ruth — meaning, it's a very tricky proposition to compare the statistics of athletes from different eras. In golf, changes in course conditioning and equipment make our sport among the most difficult to compare. However, that doesn't mean we shouldn't try.



Siderowf



Travers

Here's a look at the major career wins, along with Walker Cup appearances, of Zahringer and other top players who would be included in any discussion of the best amateurs in Met Area history:

ZAHRINGER

Met Amateur (5): 1982, 1984-'87
Ike (5): 1989, '93, 2001, '04, '07
Met Open: 1985
U.S. Mid-Am: 2002
Walker Cup: 2003

WALTER TRAVIS

Met Amateur (4): 1900, '02, '09, '15
U.S. Amateur (3): 1900-'01, '03
British Amateur: 1904

JERRY TRAVERS

Met Amateur (5): 1906-'07, '11-'13
U.S. Open: 1915
U.S. Amateur (4): 1907-'08, '12-'13

JESS SWEETSER

Met Amateur (2): 1922, '25
U.S. Amateur: 1922
British Amateur: 1926
Walker Cup (8): 1922, '23, '24, '26, '28, '32, plus captain in '67 and '73

WILLIE TURNESA

Met Amateur: 1937
Ike (2): 1957-'58
U.S. Amateur (2): 1938, '48
British Amateur: 1947
Walker Cup (3): 1947, '49, plus captain in '51

DICK SIDEROWF

Met Amateur (5): 1968-'70, '74, '89
British Amateur (2): 1973, '76
Walker Cup (4): 1973, '75, '77, plus captain in '79

JERRY COURVILLE SR.

Met Amateur (2): 1973, '79
Met Open: 1967
Ike (6): 1961, '64-'65, '67, '69-'70

JERRY COURVILLE JR.

Met Amateur (3): 1995, '97-'98
Ike (3): 1990-'91, '97
U.S. Mid-Amateur: 1995
Walker Cup (2): 1995, '97

JEFF THOMAS

Ike: 1996
U.S. Mid-Amateur: 1993
N.J. Amateur (8): 1981, '83, '85, '87-'88, '90-'91, '94

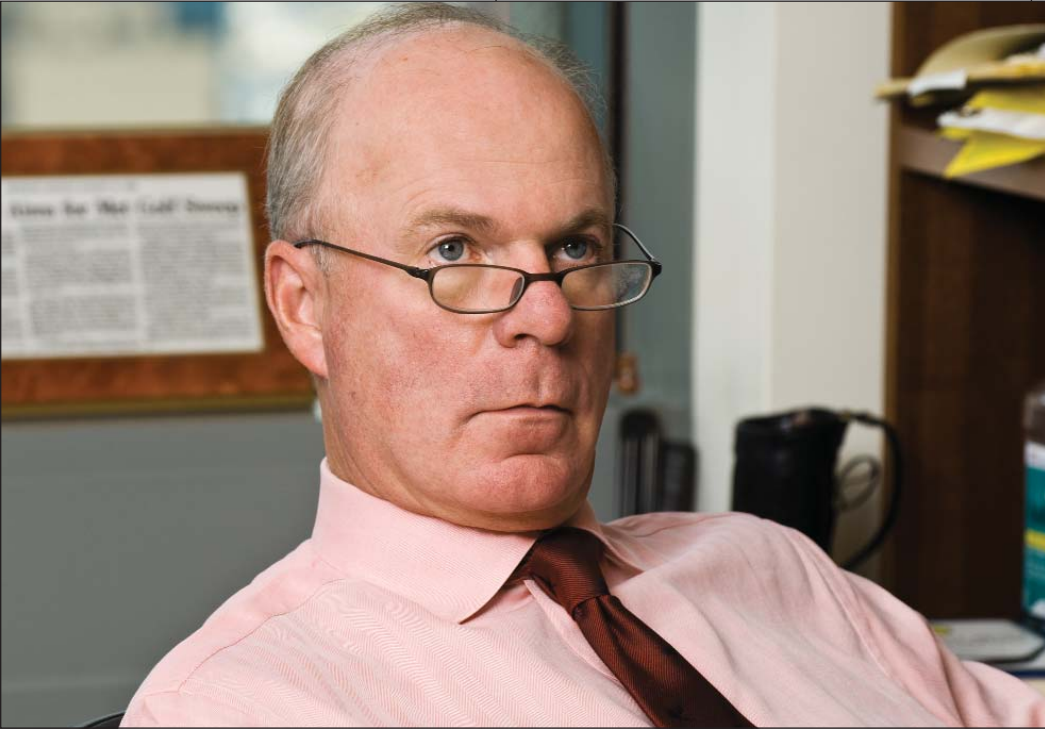
JOHNSON WAGNER

Met Amateur (2): 2001, '02
Ike: 2002
Met Open (2): 2001, '02

Despite having won fewer national titles than players such as Travis, Travers and Turnesa, Zahringer's record stacks up well. He plays against stronger, deeper fields on tougher courses. Longevity is also a factor — no one has ever been so dominant for so long. That's the mark of greatness.

Zahringer's intensity serves him just as well at his Bear Stearns office as it does on the golf course.

Augusta National chairman Hootie Johnson; and a framed note from former teacher Jim McLean with swing thoughts such as “pace,” “focus,” “relax,” “enjoy,” “finish the race,” and “think this shot all day long.” Zahringer has done so well at his job that he responds to the “turning pro” issue, a question he’s been asked “a zillion” times, with an answer that is as honest and intimidating as the man himself: “I didn’t want to take a pay cut.”



JEFF WEINER

A liberal arts graduate from Stonehill, a small Massachusetts college (“I played more soccer than I did golf”), Zahringer says his on-course success has been an asset to his business life. “It has definitely helped,” he says, “providing me with a certain exposure and name recognition over the years that has gone a long way to establishing and developing relationships.” One of those relationships is

with comedian Bill Murray, who is not only a client (many of Zahringer’s clients are high-net worth individuals), but a friend and occasional golf partner.

“I remember a couple of years ago I was playing Deepdale with Bill,” he says. “It was a fairly warm summer day and Bill took a hat out of his golf bag with a fan attached to it that blew air onto his face. The club president happened to drive up a few holes later to say

hello, and Bill was unaware that he had on this really goofy hat. It was kind of a light moment. Another time Bill and I were going out to dinner to some trendy place on the Lower East Side, and a panhandler outside the restaurant says to Bill, ‘I know you — you’re Dan Akroyd!’ Bill just howled.” High-net-worth individuals and work talk aside, if you spend some time with Zahringer

you sense immediately that money is not the driving force in his life. The real question about whether to turn pro or not, he says, never had anything to do with income, but rather with competition, or what he calls “ego-driven issues.” His competitive desires, he explains, have been amply satisfied by the quality of the competition he faces in MGA and USGA events, and the challenge of the courses he regularly plays.

“We’ve had five U.S. Mid-Amateur champions come from the Metropolitan Area, by far the most of any area,” he says. “We’ve had me, Jerry Courville Jr., Ken Bakst, Jeff Thomas, and Austin Eaton, who is in New Hampshire now. The quality of the golf is the best in the country, and I hear that from guys in other parts of the country. They recognize and understand how fortunate Met Area golfers are to have the courses we compete on. We play fast, firm greens and difficult courses all the time for MGA championships. So I think the comfort level of our top players, when they play nationally or internationally, is a little higher than golfers coming from elsewhere.”

In fact, Zahringer has often said that the MGA runs the best championships anywhere, and that competition helped fuel his success. MGA Tournament Director Gene Westmoreland says, “MGA championships are great because of our history, our sensational venues and high-quality fields that include players like George Zahringer. George may be the best *competitor* we’ve ever seen.”

Golf and business are important to Zahringer, but they are only two legs of what he calls “a three-legged stool,” with the third leg being family. His wife Anne seconds his commitment to home life, “George does a lot of educational things with the kids,” referring to seven-year-old Alexander and five-year-old Christina. “He takes the kids every day — when’s he’s not in Scotland or Ireland, that is,” she adds with a laugh. She then reveals a



In the 1979 Met Amateur at Mountain Ridge, Zahringer was runner-up to Jerry Courville but made his presence felt.

fact that his fellow competitors may use to rib him. “George sings at home,” she says. “He has a good voice and he sings with the kids.”

George Zahringer, musical? Here’s a little trivia that could win you a drink: Name the only person to attend Woodstock and play in the Masters? You wouldn’t know it to look at him, but the button-downed, Rolex-wearing Zahringer not only flopped around in the mud for three days at Woodstock, but he still cites the Allman Brothers, Cream, Eric Clapton, and Blue Oyster Cult among his favorite bands. “And Led Zeppelin,” adds Anne. Says Zahringer of his Woodstock adventure: “In 1969, I was 16 years old, and I went there for all three days. I saw Hendrix, everybody. There was a lot of mud. It stank. In fact, The [2003] Masters kind of reminded me of Woodstock because the grass was wet, and when people walked on the wet grass, it got muddy and stank in that same way.”

Today Zahringer’s non-golf adventures are much more sedate and almost entirely family-oriented. “With Alexander and Christina,

Three Decades of Success

Here’s a look at George Zahringer’s local, national and international tournament highlights since he came onto the scene as a 26-year-old in 1979. MGA events are in **bold**. Years in **bold and green** indicate when Zahringer was the MGA Player of the Year.

- 1979** **Runner-up, Met Amateur**
Winner, Westchester Amateur
Winner, Richardson Invitational
- 1980** Winner, Long Island Amateur
Winner, Richardson Invitational
- 1982** **Winner, Met Amateur**
Winner, Long Island Amateur
Winner, Richardson Invitational
- 1983 Winner, Travis Memorial

- 1984** **Winner, Met Amateur**
Winner, New York State Amateur
Winner, Travis Memorial
Winner, Nassau Invitational
- 1985** **Winner, Met Amateur**
Winner, Met Open*
**first ever to win Met Am and Met Open in same year*
- 1986** **Winner, Met Amateur**
Quarterfinalist, U.S. Mid-Amateur



- 1987** **Winner, Met Amateur**
Winner, Hochster Memorial
Quarterfinalist, U.S. Mid-Amateur
- 1988 Winner, Hochster Memorial

- 1989** **Winner, Ike Championship**
Winner, Hochster Memorial
Winner, Richardson Invitational
- 1990 Winner, Hochster Memorial
- 1991 Winner, Hochster Memorial
Quarterfinalist, 1991 British Amateur
- 1992** Winner, Westchester Amateur
Winner, New York City Amateur
Quarterfinalist, U.S. Amateur
- 1993 **Winner, Ike Championship**

- 1999 Winner, Havemeyer Memorial
Winner, Nassau Invitational
- 2000 Winner, Havemeyer Memorial
- 2001** **Winner, Ike Championship**
Winner, Hochster Memorial
Winner, Nassau Invitational
Winner, Boff Invitational
Runner-up, U.S. Mid-Amateur
- 2002 Winner, U.S. Mid-Amateur*
**Oldest champion in history*

- 2003 Competed in Masters*
Semifinalist, U.S. Mid-Amateur
Quarterfinalist, U.S. Amateur
Member, U.S. Walker Cup team
**Oldest first-time invitee*
- 2004 **Winner, Ike Championship**
- 2005 Tied for low amateur, U.S. Senior Open
- 2007** **Winner, Ike Championship**
Tied for low amateur, U.S. Senior Open
Round of 16, U.S. Amateur





Instructor Jim McLean, longtime friend and coach to Zahringer, helps him celebrate his 1986 Met Am victory at Quaker Ridge.

Anne and I tend to go down to Boca Grande, Florida. It's on the west coast, one of the barrier islands, and a great family spot. We also go to Lyford Cay Club [a private gated community located on New Providence Island in the Bahamas], where we are members." Do these trips include golf? "Perhaps, but I tend to put the clubs away in the winter." He does have a few favorite golf resorts, which he calls "the usual suspects," though most are ones

Zahringer's playing record could give a statistician heart palpitations.

he's played during tournaments. These include Pebble Beach, Casa de Campo, Whistling Straits, and Bandon Dunes, which he describes as "sensational!" So does he ever have to ask his wife for permission to play with his buddies? "That's an easy one," says Anne. "He doesn't play golf with his buddies. Only competitions."

Zahringer's journey from a longhair free spirit at Woodstock to a suit-wearing golfer living in Manhattan might surprise those who

consider the city a poor choice for someone with world-class golf abilities. "If you live in Manhattan, as I do," he says, "you are not going to walk out of your house or office and drive five minutes to hit balls. So it has some drawbacks as it relates to competitive golf. But I accept that because I think New York City is the greatest city in the world. It's a wonderful place to work and raise a young family. I grew up in Rye, but I've lived here for the better part of the last 30 years. My wife and I are involved with charitable institutions ... the Boys Club of New York, the Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum, and the New York City Ballet."

Zahringer's charitable endeavors extend to the game he plays so well. He serves on the board of the MGA Foundation and also chairs the annual MGA Day of Golf, which raises funds for the GOLFWORKS program. He has generously supported the local caddie scholarship funds, which actually relates back to Zahringer's own experience as a teenager, when he attended a summer caddie camp at Sankaty Head Golf Club on Nantucket.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that charities to which Zahringer devotes time and



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At The Masters, Zahringer bunked in the Crow's Nest with the other amateurs.

money are slanted toward children. Zahringer raised three children from a prior marriage in Manhattan, including now 24-year-old George Zahringer IV, who also plays out of Deepdale and works for Cerberus Capital Management. The business and golf parallels between father and son are there, but whether George IV will achieve George III's success remains to be seen. "He works hard at this game," says Zahringer of his son. "He is not competitively on my level right now, but I would say that he has the wherewithal to be a zero, one, two, or three handicap."

Working hard is clearly what keeps Zahringer a top player. His diligence started some 30 years ago when, as a five handicap, he asked Jim McLean to help him raise his game to the next level. At the time, McLean was the instructor at Westchester Country Club and Zahringer was a member. Today, Zahringer regularly hits the weights at a gym up the street from his office, and he does so with a precise methodology befitting a successful stockbroker. "I mentally formulate a game plan for fall, winter, and spring as far as working out," he says. When asked if he is still "long-hitting George Zahringer," which this magazine labeled him in a 1985 cover story, he responds, "I just know I don't want to be short-hitting George Zahringer!" To keep that from happening and to assure his game stays sharp, he is quick to credit a large group

he refers to as "Team Zahringer." This group includes two instructors — Kevin Sprecher at Sleepy Hollow, and Darrell Kestner at Deepdale — both of whom, he says "have known my swing for 15 years and been tremendous assets." Other Team Zahringer members include various athletic trainers, psychologists, nutritionists, hypnotists, and golf equipment people (for the record, he plays TaylorMade clubs, and, yes, amateurs can now receive free equipment). Fellow Met Area competitor Jon Doppelt believes that Zahringer's hard workout sessions contribute greatly to his success. "I always say that George is slowing down," says Doppelt, "but then he has a year like he had in 2007. I think a good part of his success is that he's always stayed in great shape." Zahringer agrees, saying that he still feels much younger than he is, and then adds, "I'll be 55 in April, and I kid my pals that I'll be able to go to the senior tees." In fact, turning 55 makes him eligible for both the MGA and U.S. Senior Amateurs, setting up yet another competitive threshold for Zahringer to conquer.

Looking back five years, Zahringer certainly must have felt like a man among boys at the 2003 Masters. Just a year shy of 50, Zahringer bunked up in the Crow's Nest with other amateur invitees, including Hunter Mahan, Ryan Moore, and Ricky Barnes. "These kids are all 20 or 21 years old," he says of his Masters roommates. "Though I rented a house for me and my family, I spent two nights in



The five amateur competitors at the 2003 Masters were invited to a dinner with then-Augusta National chairman Hootie Johnson (center). Zahringer (far left) is joined by Hunter Mahan, Alejandro Larrazabal, Ryan Moore, and Ricky Barnes.



the Crow's Nest because I wanted to experience that. The Crow's Nest is the stuff of legend. It's really a dorm. There's one bathroom, and it has three singles and a double with simple louvered doors separating the sleeping areas from the common living room. I was in the double with Ricky Barnes. There was maybe a foot-and-a-half space between our beds. It was like being in a fraternity. I complimented Ricky on being a good sleeper. I'd wake up in the morning and he'd be in the exact same position as when he went to bed the night before. It was fun, a great experience. These were great kids." Barnes remembers his roomie well. "George was great to BS with in the Crow's Nest, and was also funny," he says, "and he also said the course was going to be a bear for him because of the rain and soft conditions we had that year."

Though Zahringer had played at Augusta before as a guest, this was his first and — to date — only Masters. He fondly recalls that there was ample opportunity to interact with the professionals. "I had breakfast with Phil Mickelson," he says. "I played practice rounds with Jay Haas, Raymond Floyd, Ben Crenshaw, Sergio Garcia, Nick Faldo, and John Rollins. In the Par Three tournament, I played with Adam Scott and Niclas Fasth. It was a little bit intimidating, sure, but actually it's beneficial because it helps get some of the butterflies out of the system. You get a dress rehearsal for the real thing." So how did he do? "It was 48 degrees when I teed off," he says. "I shot a couple of 80-somethings [82-85, actually]. But I was under par in the Par Three event, and the whole week was just a tremendous experience."

The most likely way for him to get back to the Masters, Zahringer believes, is to win another U.S. Mid-Amateur. "I'd have to break my own record by six years in terms of age. I guess it's possible, but unlikely." The fact that he says it's even possible speaks to his

killer instinct, an attribute found in the world's best athletes. Eric Gleacher, a former executive committee member of the USGA, agrees that Zahringer has that rare ability to be merciless in competition. "What I like about Z," says Gleacher, referring to a common nickname for Zahringer, "is that he is a great guy, but when he competes, he does his business on the course and it's not a social outing. He has that ability to throw that switch and turn it on. He can be as tough as anybody. That is an attractive asset. Some people don't understand that."

Doppelt has seen that switch thrown firsthand in the heat of competition with Zahringer. "I was playing against him in the finals of the Richardson — incredibly, I had beaten him a few times — and we were on the 15th hole," he recalls. "We both had 2 1/2-footers and I said, 'Good good?' and George said to me 'I know I'm making mine, let's see about yours.' And I missed mine. It was all in fun, but he went on to win. He's a tough competitor, but always a gentleman."

Perhaps Gleacher sums it up best when asked to elaborate on the reasons for Zahringer's incredible success over the past 30-odd years. "Whatever words you want to use to describe George don't matter," he explains. "Just show a table with his record on it and say, 'Come on, guys, beat this.' But they can't. George's record says it all."

And so does his passion for the game and for the courses and competition in the Met Area. "There's nothing George wouldn't do for golf," says Anne. "He's dedicated his entire life to it. Our whole house is just filled with trophies and golf memorabilia."

Chances are that more trophies are on the way. If someone tells you that George Zahringer is done — even George himself — don't you bet on it. ■

Ken Baron, formerly of *Golf Connoisseur*, writes from his home in New York City

In the 1990 Metedeconk Challenge, Zahringer was a key member of the MGA team that defeated the Golfing Union of Ireland, whose team included Padraig Harrington.

