

Lesson Learned

A crushing defeat in 2018 helped Chris Gotterup become the 2019 MGA Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year **BY TIM HARTIN**

“let the nerves get to me.” This simple, honest admission is one of the many thoughts Chris Gotterup has when he looks back at the 2018 Ike at Meadow Brook Club. It’s also the most important: The lessons he learned converted a major disappointment into a turning point for Gotterup, winner of the 2019 MGA Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year Award.

Gotterup led the 2018 Ike by five shots with nine holes to play. “All of a sudden, I knew where I was,” he says. “I just started collapsing and couldn’t keep the ball in the fairway.” Instead of closing out what seemed like a sure victory, Gotterup carded a 5-over-par 41 and finished two shots behind Michael Graboyes of Watchung Valley.

Even with the letdown of the Ike and a couple other finishes, 2018 was a big stepping stone for Rumson Country Club’s Gotterup, as he finished seventh on the MGA’s Player of the Year points list. The upward trend continued for the Little Silver, N.J., native during his sophomore season at Rutgers University, where he closed the spring of 2019 with a trio of consecutive top-five finishes in collegiate events and earned Second Team All-Big Ten honors.

He entered this summer aiming to earn that elusive first MGA victory, but a missed cut in the Ike at Canoe Brook provided a less-than-ideal start. But just a few days later Gotterup and his father Morten won the

MGA’s Father & Son Championship at Cold Spring Country Club in Huntington, N.Y. Gotterup admits he brushed off his dad’s suggestion they play in such events in the past, but he’s proud of the win that came alongside the man he calls the “driving force” behind his involvement in the game. “To go out and win, that was a cool thing to do with my dad and it kind of kick-started the summer,” said Gotterup.

A fourth-place finish followed in the New Jersey Amateur at Neshanic Valley before his major breakthrough in the New Jersey Open at Trump National–Bedminster. In contention yet again down the stretch, Gotterup showed what he had learned from the previous year by firing a 4-under 32 on his inward nine to win by three shots. “I just took a deep breath and was like, ‘Finally, I got it done.’ It was a huge relief,” said Gotterup.

Even with the confidence-building win, Gotterup worked hard with swing coach

Jason Birnbaum in preparing to face Hudson National and the grueling challenge of the Met Amateur just eight days later.

“My approach to the week was to take it one step at a time because at Arcola [in 2018], I got way too caught up in what was going to happen instead of making it happen,” said Gotterup, who had earned medalist honors behind a course-record 63 but lost in the opening round of match play. “I just wanted to try and get myself a friendly seed and then go to work in match play.”

He qualified as the No. 3 seed with scores of 69-70, and in the quarterfinal round survived a 19-hole match against former Christian Brothers Academy teammate Jack Wall of Manasquan River. Another tough match ensued, as he edged Adam Xiao of

Old Westbury by a 2-and-1 margin to create an all-Big Ten final against defending champion and Penn State University senior Ryan Davis of New Jersey National.

The duo combined for nine birdies in an early eight-hole stretch, but the long-hitting Gotterup closed the morning 18 with a 3-up advantage thanks to wins on three of the final five holes. His determination and steadiness carried over into the afternoon where he won Nos. 9-10 and 12-13 to close strongly for a convincing 7-and-5 victory.

The win launched Gotterup to the top of the points list, but there was still work to be done, with such familiar competitors as Ike and New Jersey Amateur champion Dawson Jones of Eagle Oaks and Christian Cavaliere of Mahopac trailing by less than 50 points.

The Met Open at Piping Rock served as the final opportunity for Gotterup—and most others atop the listing—to gain points. After an opening round 72, Gotterup improved in rounds two and three, posting

scores of 69 and 68 to rise up the leaderboard.

“I knew I had to play well the last round, and I was watching it come down the stretch,” said Gotterup. When all the scores were final, Gotterup finished tied for 15th overall and as the third low amateur. The 100 points helped Gotterup maintain his cushion over Cavaliere and Jones, though 2017 MGA Player of the Year James Nicholas of Westchester made up ground thanks to his finish as low amateur.

Nicholas was the only threat to Gotterup’s lead as the season’s schedule wound down, but a missed cut in Fresh Meadow Country Club’s Sarazen Invitational ended his chances. Gotterup accumulated his season’s 770 points in just five events—an astounding figure considering that the MGA’s last 15 Player of the Year honorees played in more than 10 events on average during their title-winning seasons.

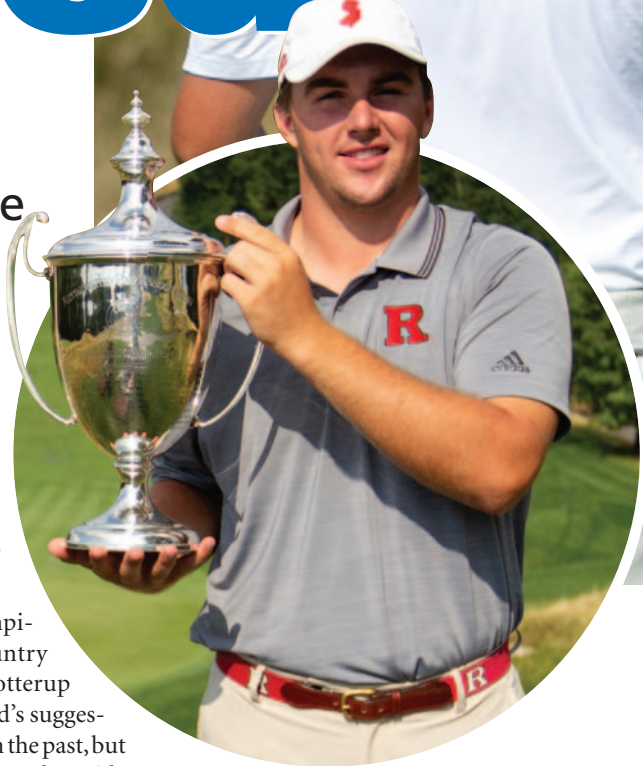
“To win the MGA Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year award is so special to me

for many reasons,” said Gotterup. “I have grown up playing in MGA events since I was a little kid, and to see what I have become over the years is pretty awesome looking back on it. To have my name be affiliated with some of the great names in the history of the MGA and golf in general is truly awesome.”

A experience like Gotterup had in the 2018 Ike has the potential to haunt players for years, but with a pair of big-stage victories in 2019, he can look back fondly on the then-crushing finish. “That was the best thing that probably has ever happened to me, because I realized what I did wrong and got to learn so much from that one event,” said Gotterup.

For Gotterup, the shift came in his focus on the golf course. Instead of watching scores or seeing how he stands, he tries to think and talk about anything except golf as he strolls the fairways. “You just have to hit each shot the best you can. When I get

Gotterup shakes hands with Jack Wall in the quarterfinals of the Met Amateur (center); two days later he took home the trophy (left).



Metropolitan Golf Association
2019 Jerry Courville Sr.
Player of the Year Honor Roll

1.	Chris Gotterup	Rumson Country Club	770
2.	Christian Cavaliere	Mahopac Golf and Beach Club	733
3.	James Nicholas	Westchester Country Club	700
4.	Dawson Jones	Eagle Oaks Golf & Country Club	680
5.	Brad Tilley	Sleepy Hollow Country Club	595
6.	Trevor Randolph	Arcola Country Club	523
7.	Thomas La Morte	Knickerbocker Country Club	509
8.	Jonathan Jeter	Nassau Players Club	456
9.	Prescott Butler	Meadow Brook Club	390
10.	Jack Wall	Manasquan River Golf Club	389

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up to the shot, I focus in for that 20-30 seconds, know what I have to do, then kind of go back to relaxing,” he says.

This mentality has carried into his fall season at Rutgers, where he posted another

string of three-consecutive top-five finishes and even gained his first collegiate victory, firing 14-under-par (68-63-68) in the Fighting Irish Classic to best a quality field by eight shots. With his game and confidence

continuing to reach new heights, Gotterup is poised and eager for what stands ahead: “It’ll be tough to back it up, but I’m going to see what I can do again next year. I’m excited for what’s in store.” ■