

CDGA PLAYER OF THE YEAR

# Jay Dempsey



PHOTO BY PETER WAGNER

JAY DEMPSEY will soon see his name engraved on the CDGA's Player of the Year trophy, thanks to a solid summer.

With his tie for 21st at the State Mid-Amateur held in May at White Eagle Golf Club (Naperville), a victory at the CDGA Amateur in June at Evanston Golf Club (Skokie) and a runner-up finish to Todd Mitchell at the Illinois State Amateur in August at Piper Glen Golf Club (Springfield), Dempsey becomes the sixth individual to take Player of the Year honors in the award's 11-year history.

The self-employed stock trader was thrilled to win the CDGA Amateur, but he cites two other rounds this summer as highlights.

The first came at his CDGA Amateur quarterfinal match against Craig McDonnell from Beverly Country Club. Dempsey took an extra hole to win the match 1-up.

"I was lucky to get off to a real hot start, but then Craig came back," explains Dempsey. "Then, it became a real battle back and forth. Finally, I was fortunate to be the last one left standing. We both finished under par; it was too bad someone had to lose."

The second highlight was actually his almost-win at the State Amateur, playing alongside Mitchell for the final 36 holes.

"It was kind of hot and muggy, but even with the 36 holes, it wasn't physically tiring—I was fine physically—it was your mental endurance that was really tested," he says.

"Todd just didn't make any mistakes," Dempsey continues. "It was a close match, and I missed some birdie chances on 16 and 17. Todd made bogey on 17, so I was within one stroke. I made about a 20- to 25-foot putt for birdie on 18 and Todd needed to make a quirky 10-footer to win. Like the champion he is, he made the putt. Even though I lost, it was exciting and a lot of fun to compete in that atmosphere."

Dempsey credits his success to a couple of factors. For one, he has spent more time working on his short game the past few seasons. That, coupled with some swing work this past summer from his club pro, Gary Groh, has improved his game.

"Winning the Player of the Year Award is certainly a tremendous honor with all the talented golfers in the District you can play with and compete against," notes Dempsey. "It takes some skill and a lot of luck to do this."

With a second child on the way sure to adjust his priorities, Dempsey hopes he can keep playing at this high level in 2004. "We'll see if I can play the same schedule of tournaments," he says. "I plan to just play, keep practicing and see where that takes me."

CDGA SENIOR PLAYER OF THE YEAR

# Fred Lukasik

HOW does someone follow up "the greatest year of golf in my whole life, no question about it," which is how Fred Lukasik paid tribute to his stellar 2002 season? Well, Lukasik repeated as CDGA Senior Player of the Year in 2003 by following a simple mantra this time around: Have fun.

"Heck, it was a great year just because I finally won something!" laughs Lukasik.

Last year, Lukasik was not a titlist but was remarkably consistent, finishing in the top five at three local events: the CDGA Senior Amateur (2nd), the Illinois Senior PGA Open (T-5th) and the Illinois Senior Amateur (3rd). He also qualified for the U.S. Senior Open (missed cut), U.S. Senior Amateur (reached match play) and the British Senior Amateur (37th). Along the way, his consistent play took him from a virtual unknown among his peers to one of the players to beat.

In 2003, instead of worrying about repeating and putting a lot of pressure on himself, Lukasik simply set out to enjoy the competition.

This year, he did finally notch the elusive victory at the CDGA Senior Amateur and played a solid tournament at the State Amateur. He also played in the Heartland Cup, as well as the U.S. Senior Open and Senior Amateur qualifiers, the British Senior Amateur and numerous other national team and individual events in Houston, Louisville and Hot Springs, Ark.

"Golf is such a great game," says Lukasik. "You can keep playing it until you're dead, really. Yes, everyone at the senior level is competitive, but every single player is very friendly, everyone is truly a gentleman. We all want to do well, we always want to compete and try to win, but if we don't we've been around enough to know that the sun will come up again the next day, no matter how you play."

Lukasik is quick to note that he could never accomplish what he has without his family. "Oh, I get a lot of support from my family," he explains. "When you are married with a family you have to have everyone's support and I do. I wouldn't be able to do this without all the help I've had from my wife and kids over the years."

Can he get the three-peat in 2004? Don't bet against him. He'll be ready. "I'll be working out through the winter and staying in shape," Lukasik adds. "Oh yeah, I'm already looking forward to another golf season, whatever it brings."



PHOTO BY KALLIE LUKASIK

HEARTLAND PLAYER OF THE YEAR

# Todd Mitchell

AS a baseball player, Todd Mitchell will never be confused with Kevin Costner's "Crash Davis" character in *Bull Durham*, for a few reasons. For starters, Mitchell was a shortstop, not a catcher. For another, Mitchell decided that two years of minor league baseball was enough, while Crash played 12 seasons and couldn't walk away. Then, consider the fact that all that baseball kept him from playing golf...

Drafted in the 14th round as a junior out of Illinois State University by the New York Yankees, Mitchell quickly realized his journey through the unglamorous world of minor league baseball would not end with him becoming the next Derek Jeter.

"Pretty quickly enough was enough," explains Mitchell. "I lived one-third of the year in Bloomington, one-third in Tampa or Greensboro and one-third in hotels. You can only spend so much time on those buses. And I only played golf three times over a whole year."

Golf had always been Mitchell's true love. When his father was stationed with the Navy in Florida during Vietnam, he caught the golf bug. By the time Todd Mitchell was old enough to stand, he was swinging his dad's cut-down clubs at whiffle balls. "There are all kinds of pictures of me at two years old swinging golf clubs," recalls Mitchell.

Today, Mitchell is happy balancing work at Clemons & Associates Insurance Agency in Bloomington, where he sells commercial transportation insurance, with as much golf as he can.

This summer, his biggest golf accomplishment was defending his Illinois State Amateur title at Piper Glen Golf Club in Springfield. "In '02, I was an unknown, just trying to play my best," says Mitchell. "Nobody knew me around the state. With no pressure, I just went out on the final day and posted a low score and waited as the others came back to me. In '03, I had the advantage of having the guy who would be my main competition—Jay Dempsey—as my playing partner."

Looking to next year, Mitchell hopes to defend his State Amateur title and play more CDGA events. This year included his first CDGA Mid-Amateur and qualifying for the U.S. Amateur Championship. "Playing at Oakmont [for the U.S. Amateur] was an amazing experience," raves Mitchell. "That course and those greens are unlike anything you find in the Midwest."

A priority for 2004 will be consistent success. "That's definitely an ultimate goal, to win the CDGA Player of the Year Award," says Mitchell. "With so many great players in the District, that's really accomplishing something special."

Knowing life on the road, Mitchell does not see the PGA Tour in his future. So, what about the senior circuit? "I don't know what I am doing next week, let alone 25 years from now," laughs Mitchell. "We'll just have to see..."

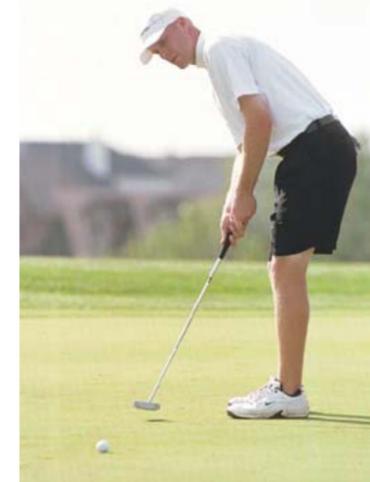


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