

Medalist Ben Warnquist Survives Day of Thrills, Spills at U.S. Mid-Amateur

By David Shefter, USGA

What Happened

Extra-hole matches. Wild comebacks. Upsets of high seeds. For the match-play enthusiast, the Round of 64 in the 39th U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship on Monday at Colorado Golf Club had a little of everything.

Seven matches went extra holes, including a 23-hole thriller, and seeds 2, 3, 4, 6 and 10 all were sent packing. Four of the six golfers who competed in Monday morning's marathon 18-for-6 playoff for the final spots in the draw also advanced.

But the medalist and top seed Ben Warnquist, 26, of Gaithersburg, Md., avoided the upset bug against Joey Savoie, 25, of Canada, 2 up. Based solely on the World Amateur Golf Ranking™, Savoie had a clear advantage – 79 vs. 4,747 – but he also needed to play nine holes early Monday just to garner the last spot from the 4-hour, 4-minute playoff.

Perhaps fatigue and Warnquist's solid play eventually took its toll on the Quebec native. Warnquist, a University of Maryland graduate, shook off a pair of early 1-down deficits to win holes 8, 10 and 13, and despite losing the par-3 17th with a bogey, his conceded birdie on No. 18 landed him a spot in the Round of 32.

"I played alright," said Warnquist, an insurance agent who was the co-runner-up in the 2016 U.S. Amateur Four-Ball with Brandon Cigna. "I didn't get much out of a lot of good shots I hit. I was grinding. I was working hard. I'm happy to squeak one out."

Many eyes were on No. 6 seed Garrett Rank, 32, of Canada, who faced a possible dilemma if he advanced. Rank, entering his fourth full season as an NHL referee, had a scheduled exhibition game Tuesday night at the Pepsi Center in downtown Denver between the Colorado Avalanche and Las Vegas Golden Knights. But any potential job conflict ended when the 2019 Western Amateur champion saw an early 3-up advantage wiped away in a 3-and-1 defeat to Daniel DeBra, 42, of Lutz, Fla.

"I don't want to make excuses, but it would have been tough to work a game tomorrow night and try and make a run to the end," said Rank, who also is scheduled to work an Avalanche home game on Thursday night. "I gave it a good try and at the end of the day I had a good week. It kind of stinks that hockey season is coming and I won't touch clubs for another four or five months. That's the choices I have made."

Other highly seeded players also saw their championship runs end prematurely. No. 2 seed Robbie Ziegler, 29, of Portland, Ore.; No. 3 seed Ryan Eibner, 28, of Dallas, Texas; No. 4 seed Brandon Dalinka, 26, of New York, N.Y.; and No. 10 seed Drew Kittleson, 30, of Scottsdale, Ariz., were all defeated.

Playoff survivor Nick Geyer – he birdied the par-4 12th hole to secure the second-to-last spot in the draw – maintained his morning momentum with a 4-and-3 win over Ziegler. The 32-year-old from San Diego, Calif., built a 2-up lead at the turn and closed out his opponent with a birdie on the par-5 15th.

“To get through the crazy playoff, where anything can happen, and then to get lucky enough to beat Robbie, who is a great player, I feel really great,” said Geyer, a lefty who graduated from the University of New Mexico in 2010 and regained his amateur status in 2013.

“It’s hard to get into a rhythm in the playoff so I wouldn’t say I had momentum ... necessarily. To birdie [No.] 12 in the playoff was awesome. But I had been playing well all week.”

Kent Monas, 31, of Akron, Ohio, closed out 2018 U.S. Mid-Amateur quarterfinalist Eibner, 1 up, by converting a 12-foot par putt on 18. David Noll Jr., 47, of Dalton, Ga., needed 21 holes to oust Dalinka, who finally qualified for match play in his sixth USGA start.

“Considering he is one the best players here, absolutely,” said Monas when asked if this was his biggest win. “He is a great player. It was kind of a pillow fight all day.”

John Ehrgott, 30, of Peoria, Ill., rallied from an early 4-down deficit after four holes to beat Kittleson, the 2008 U.S. Amateur runner-up.

The match between 2014 champion Scott Harvey, 41, of Greensboro, N.C., and Derek Busby, 35, of Ruston, La., lived up to its billing. Neither player held more than a 1-up lead, with Busby, No. 162 in the WAGR, earning a 23-hole victory. Harvey, a member of the 2015 USA Walker Cup Team, had a golden chance to close out Busby on 18, but missed a 6-foot, left-to-right sliding birdie putt. Busby then kept the match going by converting a 25-foot par putt on the par-5 first hole, the 19th of the match, after taking an unplayable lie. On the par-3 20th, Harvey missed an 8-footer to close out the match. Three holes later, Busby had his 15-foot birdie putt conceded.

“If you asked both of us, that’s probably what we expected,” said Busby. “That’s elite-level golf. That’s what you do to win, you have to find a way. The past three years [in the U.S. Mid-Amateur] I have been beaten, 1 up, and this time I found a way.”

Defending champion Kevin O’Connell, 31, of Jacksonville, Fla., advanced with a 4-and-3 win over Andrew Wyatt, setting up a rematch on Tuesday morning with Andres Schonbaum, 28, of Argentina. Schonbaum, who eliminated Bryan Jones, of Atlanta, Ga., lost to O’Connell in 19 holes in last year’s quarterfinals. It was the first of two 19-hole wins that day for O’Connell.

Also moving on was 2016 champion Stewart Hagestad, 28, of Newport Beach, Calif., who cruised to a 4-and-3 win over William Davenport, of Palm City, Fla. It’s been a whirlwind month for the University of Southern California graduate, traveling to Peru for the Pan American Games (team gold medal), then to Pinehurst for the U.S. Amateur (lost in Round of 64), England for the Walker Cup (USA victory at Royal Liverpool) and then to Colorado for the U.S. Mid-Amateur.

“Keep your standards really high, practice accordingly, play as hard as you can, and hope for the best,” said Hagestad.

What’s Next

Match play continues on Tuesday with the Round of 32 and the Round of 16. The first match is scheduled for 7 a.m. CDT, with the Round-of-16 matches commencing at 1 p.m. The quarterfinals and semifinals will be contested on Wednesday, with the 36-hole final on Thursday at 7 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.

Notable

The nine-hole, 4-hour, 4-minute playoff is believed to be the longest in U.S. Mid-Amateur history. The previous long was six holes in 2007 at Bandon Dunes. **Joey Savoie**, 25, of Canada, the youngest player in this year's field, garnered the last spot with an up-and-down bogey on the par-4 18th hole after hitting his tee shot into the trees. **Tyler Gulliksen**, of Daytona Beach, Fla., a U.S. Navy explosive ordnance disposal officer, three-putted for a 6.

In addition to **Scott Harvey**, two other past champions were eliminated in the Round of 64. Four-time winner **Nathan Smith**, of Pittsburgh, Pa., lost to **Stephen Hale**, of Bakersfield, Calif., 5 and 4. **Matt Parziale**, of Brockton, Mass. (2017), fell to **Jeremy Gearhart**, of Atascadero, Calif., 4 and 3.

Seven countries, including the United States (56), were represented in match play. They included Argentina, Australia, Canada (3), Guatemala, South Africa and Wales.

Three players in their 50s qualified for match play, led by **Dave Bunker**, 54, of Canada. The other two were **Todd White**, 51, a high school history teacher at Spartanburg (S.C.) High School, and **Chad Branton**, 50, of Cartersville, Ga. White was the lone player to advance, posting a 4-and-3 win over **Nicholas Gunthorpe**, of East Lansing, Mich.

Jon Olson, of Ankeny, Iowa, rallied from an early 4-down deficit to beat **Bunker**, 2 and 1. After the two competitors tied the par-5 first hole, they went 11 consecutive holes without a tie. Olson won six of seven holes from the sixth. He graduated from the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs in 2003.

Speaking of rallies, **Jason Schultz**, of Allen, Texas, came back from 2 down with two to play to defeat **Timothy Schaezel**, of Atlanta, Ga., in 19 holes, going par-birdie-birdie.

Andrew Liao of the USGA Rules and Competitions staff served as the walking referee for the **Todd White-Nicholas Gunthorpe** match when the assigned U.S. Mid-Amateur Committee official, **Paul McNamara**, was unavailable due to caddie duties. McNamara's son, also named Paul, qualified for match play as the No. 3 seed and then the Dallas, Texas, resident won his Round-of-64 match in 19 holes over **Stephen Powers**, of Denver, Colo.

Despite Powers' defeat, the other two Colorado residents in the field advanced. **Nick Nosewicz**, of Aurora, who turned 36 on Sunday, posted a 4-and-3 win over **Troy Johnson**, of Maple Grove, Minn. **Ryan Axland**, of Denver, edged **Herbie Aikens**, of Kingston, Mass., 2 and 1.

Quotable

"Maybe a little bit. You try and shut that out, but everybody is texting me about being medalist. That's a big honor and I am very happy about that, but you want to win the golf tournament. That's a little distracting but I was happy to be validated." – **Ben Warnquist**, of Gaithersburg, Md., on the pressure of being the No. 1 seed

"This place is really good for course management and I was really trying to do that. The letter from [course co-designer Ben] Crenshaw was really cool and put me in the mindset of where we would he want you to play that shot. I tried to strategize around approach shots and that has been successful out here." – **Nick Geyer**, of San Diego, Calif., on his strategy for Colorado Golf Club

"I really like this golf course it reminds me of a couple places. There is place in Montana called Rock Creek and Friar's Head [on Long Island]. I like most of the holes and I know the USGA will give us risk-

reward holes on top of what's already out there. The golf course provides the opportunity for a lot of firepower to take place." – 2016 champion **Stewart Hagestad**, of Newport Beach, Calif., on the layout

"You feel good about winning but there is so far to go. After Scott [Harvey] conceded the birdie [on the 23rd hole], I walked off, gathered myself, and took about five minutes to let it sink in and now it's into recovery and get ready for tomorrow." – **Derek Busby**, of Ruston, La., on his extra-hole win

"It's golf. Wherever it goes, it goes, and you hit it and find it and what happens, happens. I am old enough to realize that now." – **Kent Monas**, of Akron, Ohio, on his mindset for match play

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