

Ziegler and Engellenner Shoot 5 Under in First Round of 39th U.S. Mid-Amateur

By David Shefter, USGA

What Happened

Marc Engellenner, 41, of Rocklin, Calif., matched the competitive course record at CommonGround Golf Course on Saturday, carding a 5-under-par 65 to share the Round 1 U.S. Mid-Amateur lead with Robbie Ziegler, 29, of Portland, Ore. Ziegler shot 5-under 67 at the par-72 Colorado Golf Club.

Engellenner's performance on a cloudless day with temperatures in the 80s came on the 7,466-yard, par-70 stroke-play co-host for the championship. He was one stroke better than 2008 U.S. Amateur runner-up Drew Kittleson, 30, of Scottsdale, Ariz.

The 65 tied the competitive mark set by eight players in 2012 when the course was the stroke-play co-host for the U.S. Amateur Championship at Cherry Hills Country Club. That group includes PGA Tour winners Justin Thomas, Max Homa and Cheng-Tsung Pan.

Ziegler, who was born in Denver, had the lowest round at Colorado Golf Club, which measured 7,585 yards. That was one better than 2016 U.S. Amateur Four-Ball co-runner-up Ben Warnquist, 26, of Gaithersburg, Md. Colorado Golf Club will host the match-play portion of the championship beginning on Monday.

Engellenner's day got off to a hot start when he eagled the 646-yard, par-5 third, hitting a hybrid from 300 yards to 8 feet. His other three birdies on the outward nine were from 6 feet and closer, and despite a minor hiccup on the par-4 16th, his lone bogey of the round, he closed with a birdie on the 596-yard, par-5 18th hole.

"I hit my driver really well today, so I had a lot of wedges into the greens," said Engellenner, a founding partner of an event insurance company who missed the cut in his only other U.S. Mid-Amateur start in 2017. "It was one of the best days ever."

Kittleson, a reinstated amateur (2016) who had not competed in a USGA championship since the 2010 U.S. Amateur at Chambers Bay, entered the U.S. Mid-Amateur because several of his friends believe he can no longer compete on a national level.

"They think I'm washed up. They think I am terrible," said Kittleson. "And they text me that. I've got to overcome a bunch of obstacles."

Despite struggling as a professional, the 2011 Florida State graduate did have a decorated junior and amateur career, reaching the quarterfinals of the 2005 U.S. Junior Amateur before losing in the 36-hole final of the 2008 U.S. Amateur to then 18-year-old Danny Lee, of New Zealand, at Pinehurst No. 2.

Kittleson produced a bogey-free round highlighted by an eagle-3 on the 539-yard seventh hole; his 7-iron second stopped 20 feet from the flagstick.

"The course is beautiful," said Kittleson of CommonGround. CGC (Colorado Golf Club) is awesome too. There's no wind or anything and it's soft, so there's plenty of birdies out there."

Ziegler, a 2012 graduate of the University of Oregon, overcame a double bogey on the challenging 204-yard, 17th hole with an eagle on the par-5 16th and a 4-under 32 on his second nine, Colorado Golf

Club's outward nine, that included five birdies. This is Ziegler's third USGA championship of 2019 following the U.S. Amateur Four-Ball at Bandon Dunes and the U.S. Amateur at Pinehurst.

"I have played in [USGA championships] before so I have a good feel for what we need to do in the stroke-play portion," said Ziegler, who is making his seventh USGA appearance. "You don't want to be too aggressive – conservative lines and aggressive swings – at least the first day of the tournament. I kind of stuck to that game plan and it worked out."

After getting off to a slow start and shooting 1-over 37 on the outward nine of Colorado Golf Club, Warnquist, an insurance agent and 2015 graduate of the University of Maryland, blistered the second nine with six birdies over a seven-hole stretch.

"When I made the turn, I got motivated," said Warnquist. "I hit a few good shots and made a few putts. I birdied [holes] 10, 11 and 12, which was encouraging because you have two par 5s (15 and 16) after that."

What's Next

The championship continues on Sunday with the second round of stroke play. Players will swap courses, with the low 64 scorers advancing to match play, which commences on Monday at Colorado Golf Club. A playoff, if necessary to decide the final spots in the bracket, will take place at Colorado Golf Club on Monday morning.

Notable

Kevin O'Connell's title defense got off to a rocky start with a 5-over 77 at Colorado Golf Club. The Jacksonville, Fla., resident is vying to become the first back-to-back champion since Nathan Smith (2009-10).

Bob Royak, 57, of Alpharetta, Ga., who won the U.S. Senior Amateur on Aug. 29 at Old Chatham Golf Club in Durham, N.C., registered the 26th hole-in-one in U.S. Mid-Amateur history. He aced the 186-yard sixth hole at CommonGround with a 6-iron en route to an even-par 70. It was Royak's 11th career hole-in-one.

It was a whirlwind 24 hours for **Gene Elliott**, of West Des Moines, Iowa. On Friday, the 57-year-old won his second Canadian Senior Amateur by five strokes in suburban Toronto. That night, he flew to Denver for his 1 p.m. CDT starting time at Colorado Golf Club. Competing without a practice round, Elliott, who is No. 294 in the World Amateur Golf Ranking™ (highest ranked player 55 and older), carded a 4-over 76.

Twelve players in this year's field competed at CommonGround when it was the stroke-play co-host for the 2012 U.S. Amateur. The list is headlined by four-time U.S. Mid-Amateur champion **Nathan Smith**, of Pittsburgh, Pa.

Speaking of past U.S. Mid-Amateur champions, several recent winners got off to solid starts. **Matt Parziale**, of Brockton, Mass. (2017); **Scott Harvey**, of Greensboro, N.C. (2014); and two-time USA Walker Cup competitor **Stewart Hagestad**, of Newport Beach, Calif. (2016), carded rounds of 70, 70 and 73, respectively. Parziale and Harvey played CommonGround, while Hagestad was at Colorado Golf Club.

The stroke average at Colorado Golf Club was 77.6 (5.6 strokes over par), while at par-70 CommonGround the average was 73.8. The toughest hole at Colorado Golf Club was the 199-yard, par-3 17th (3.81), while the 505-yard, par-4 15th was the toughest at CommonGround (4.59).

Tim Beans, of Newport Beach, Calif., withdrew after 16 holes at CommonGround due to a back injury. **Andrew Price**, of Lake Bluff, Ill., also withdrew after six holes at Colorado Golf Club due to an undisclosed injury.

Quotable

“It was probably about as tough and firm of a golf course as I’ve probably ever played in a tournament. And it was also very fair. I think if it was any firmer, it would have been hard getting the ball stopped where you were trying to. In terms of tournament set-up, I don’t think you could have done a better job. I mean it was just a fair, tough golf course.” – **Marc Engellenner**, of Rocklin, Calif., on course conditions at CommonGround Golf Course.

“I get the feeling that a lot of people are just excited to be here. If you’re excited to be here, you’re going to get killed. You shouldn’t just be excited to be here. You should be trying to win. I could shoot 100 tomorrow and be fine too, but some of the people come out here and are hoping instead of actually playing to win.” – **Drew Kittleson**, of Scottsdale, Ariz., on the mindset you need to play well in USGA events

“[My caddie and I] were just talking about it. I’ve never played in one, so I don’t know what to think really. I’m a mid-am, I work, I have a family and stuff, so it’s different. But the U.S. Am, the quality of the field is a lot better. Not a knock on this field, it’s just the reality. College kids that play golf every day are better than us.” – **Kittleson** on competing in his first U.S. Mid-Amateur

“Everything was steady. I hit a lot of fairways and a lot of greens. I was fortunate to make a couple of mid-range putts to keep the momentum going during the middle of the round. But my back nine (the course’s front nine) I hit it close a bunch and I made all of the [putts] essentially. It was really steady and the rest took care of itself.” – **Robbie Ziegler**, of Portland, Ore., on his 5-under 67 at Colorado Golf Club

“I came out [to Colorado] quite a bit this summer, and then actually I played the U.S. Am out here in 2012 when it was at Cherry Hills, so I was familiar with the golf course. The elevation I have kind of gotten used to. My caddie, Neil, is local here and he hits it pretty similar to me, so he’s helped me out a lot with yardages. It’s been helpful.” – **Ryan Eibner**, of Dallas, Texas, on adjusting to the altitude

“I feel like it is a bonus tournament. I feel lucky to be here. I haven’t been able to play the last few years, so playing with that attitude, and hopefully that attitude will give way to a good week.” – NHL referee **Garrett Rank**, of Canada, who shot 3-under 69 at Colorado Golf Club, on teeing it up in the U.S. Mid-Amateur for the first time in six years

“So cool to be honest. Lot of confidence from it and it really hasn’t sunk in. I am sure during the dog days of winter or in the airport or in a snowstorm somewhere I will be able to enjoy it more. I am really thrilled with that. I have been chasing a big one for a long time and had a lot of good results, it was finally nice to get my name on the trophy.” – **Rank** on his confidence since winning the prestigious Western Amateur in early August

“Probably one of my better [USGA] rounds. I felt like this was one of the tougher set-ups, this course. I was playing pretty conservatively most of the day. Coming into the back nine there were some shots where I could attack a little bit. That was pretty fun.” – **Troy Johnson**, of Maple Grove, Minn., after shooting a 3-under 69 at Colorado Golf Club