

Ben Warnquist Bests U.S. Mid-Amateur Field to Earn Medalist Honors

By David Shefter, USGA

What Happened

Ben Warnquist, 26, of Gaithersburg, Md., a past runner-up in a USGA championship, earned himself another medal on Sunday by besting the field in the stroke-play portion of the 39th U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship.

Warnquist, who finished second with partner Brandon Cigna in the 2016 U.S. Amateur Four-Ball Championship, matched his 68 from Saturday's opening round at Colorado Golf Club on Sunday at stroke-play co-host CommonGround Golf Course to post a 36-hole total of 6-under 136. His score was one stroke better than Robbie Ziegler, 29, of Portland, Ore.; 2018 quarterfinalist Ryan Eibner, 28, of Dallas, Texas; Brandon Dalinka, 26, of New York, N.Y.; and Paul McNamara, 28, of Dallas, Texas.

"It means a lot," said Warnquist. "It's not the end goal, but it means a lot. My game's been coming a long way the past couple of years and I've never done anything like this. I've always been a good two-day player. I've won a lot of qualifiers, nothing like this, but I'd like to extend and see if I could be a five- or six-day player and go a little deeper."

The Denver-born Ziegler, who posted a 5-under 67 on Saturday for the low round at the 7,620-yard, par-72 Colorado Golf Club, had a 1-under 70 at 7,558-yard, par-70 Commonground, finishing his round by converting a 3-foot birdie on the 596-yard, par-5 18th hole. The other three players all played Colorado Golf Club on Sunday, with McNamara matching Ziegler's Saturday effort with a 67. McNamara had a 68 and Eibner shot a 70.

The cut for match play came at 5-over 147. Eighteen players will play off Monday morning at Colorado Golf Club for the final six spots in the 64-player draw.

Warnquist, an insurance agent who graduated in 2015 from the University of Maryland, never had to worry about the cut. But his 10-foot birdie putt on the par-4 ninth, his last of the day, pushed him out of the logjam at 5 under.

"I figured I was close," said Warnquist. "I got an update that [the lead] was at like 5, 6, 7 [under], somewhere in there, so I was really grinding to try and finish strong.

"Whatever it was, coming from Maryland to Colorado, anything inside 100 yards [for an approach shot] has been tricky. Whether it be the elevation or the firmness, I don't know. But I haven't been hitting them close, so I was happy to hit one to inside 10 feet there and make the putt."

Leaving CommonGround on Saturday night, McNamara's thoughts weren't on chasing medalist honors. It was simply finding energy to tee it up. The University of Notre Dame graduate had played well, shooting a 1-under 70, but after 12 holes, he became so dehydrated that he needed an IV after signing his score card. He still felt dizzy on the drive back to the hotel.

"We were just trying to make it to the course today and didn't do a full warm-up," said McNamara. "So it was, 'beware of the sick golfer.' I didn't have a ton of energy and maybe that helped because I wasn't so over-hyped. Eventually I got warmed up and found the groove. I focused on staying hydrated instead of focusing on the golf."

Dalinka's goals were just making match play after failing to do so in his five previous USGA starts, including three U.S. Amateurs – one of which came here in Colorado seven years ago. A 30-foot birdie putt on the 582-yard, par-5 16th punctuated the round.

"I just tried to stay calm," said Dalinka, a University of North Carolina graduate who now works in finance. "My dad is on the bag and he has kept me level-headed. I made a couple of mental mistakes not calculating the altitude, which cost me two bogeys. I rolled a lot of putts in and got lucky."

Eibner, a 2013 graduate of East Carolina University, also had the experience of playing the 2012 U.S. Amateur at Cherry Hills and CommonGround. His round included a 201-yard, 7-iron approach to 4 feet to set up an eagle on the par-5 seventh hole and a 16-foot downhill birdie on the 467-yard, par-4 18th hole.

"Honestly, I haven't been playing a lot," said Eibner. "Last week was my club championship at Trinity Forest and it's a match-play deal so that prepared me. I haven't played a whole lot, tournament-wise. My swing is pretty simple, I know what's going on with it. I am a ball-striker, so if I am hitting well, I am going to play well. This is all about holing putts."

What's Next

The playoff for the final match-play spots will commence at 7 a.m. CDT off No. 10 at Colorado Golf Club. The first Round-of-64 match is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m., with the final match going off at 2:10 p.m. Match play continues through Thursday's 36-hole final.

Notable

The shot of the day came at CommonGround Golf Course's 18th hole, where **Nick Nosewicz**, of Aurora, Colo., holed out for an eagle-3 from 115 yards with a sand wedge. That moved Nosewicz from 6 over to 4 over and inside the match-play cut. The ball found the hole on the fly, drawing a loud shriek from his group of supporters. It also damaged the hole, forcing USGA officials to cut a new one about a foot from its original location.

Notable players who will be involved in the playoff include **Gene Elliott**, the No. 1 senior golfer (55 and older) in the World Amateur Golf Ranking™ at 294 who just won the Canadian Senior Amateur on Friday; **Joey Savoie**, who represented Canada in this summer's Pan American Games in Peru; and 2013 U.S. Mid-Amateur runner-up **Bill Williamson**.

Harley Abrams, of Evanston, Ill., made a 35-foot putt from off the 18th green to clinch a spot in Monday's playoff. Abrams had shot 5 over on his previous three holes to put his chances in peril, but came through with a clutch shot playing in the final group of the day at Colorado Golf Club.

Among the notables to make the cut were past U.S. Mid-Amateur champions **Matt Parziale**, **Scott Harvey**, **Stewart Hagestad**, **Kevin O'Connell** and four-time winner **Nathan Smith**. O'Connell rebounded from a first-round 77 at Colorado Golf Club to shoot a 1-under 69 at CommonGround. Also advancing to match play was 2018 runner-up **Brett Boner**.

Notable players who failed to qualify included past U.S. Mid-Amateur champions **Michael McCoy** and **Randy Lewis**, 1996 U.S. Amateur Public Links champion **Tim Hogarth** and 2019 U.S. Senior Amateur champion **Bob Royak**.

It was a tough weekend for the Colorado husband-wife duo of **Kent** and **Janet Moore**. Kent, the oldest player in the field at 63, shot 82-76 to miss the cut, while Janet, who reached the Round of 32 in last month's U.S. Senior Women's Amateur, failed to qualify for match play in the U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur at Forest Highlands Golf Club in Flagstaff, Ariz., with rounds of 84-81. Kent played in the inaugural U.S. Mid-Amateur in 1981 at Bellerive Country Club in St. Louis, Mo., and is a member of the Colorado Golf Hall of Fame. Janet also is a member of the Colorado Golf Hall of Fame.

Of the 12 Colorado residents to start the championship, only **Ryan Axlund** (Denver) and **Nosewicz** are in the match-play draw, while another, **Stephen Powers** (Denver), is in the playoff on Monday morning.

Former NFL wide receiver and Colorado Golf Club member **Brandon Stokley** served as a walking scorer for the 7:33 a.m. group off the 10th tee on Sunday. Stokley, who won Super Bowl titles with the Baltimore Ravens and Indianapolis Colts, played for six different teams during his 15-year career.

Jeff Wilson, of Fairfield, Calif., the 2018 U.S. Senior Amateur champion, withdrew on Sunday morning due to an illness. Wilson opened with an 84 at Colorado Golf Club on Saturday. Wilson is one of two players to have earned low-amateur honors in a U.S. Open (2000) and U.S. Senior Open (2018), joining two-time USGA champion **Marvin "Vinny" Giles**.

Alex Snickenberger, of Boston, Mass., also withdrew due to illness. He had carded a 4-over 74 at CommonGround on Saturday.

Quotable

"It's cool for my parents to come back. They got transferred from Wisconsin to here and then transferred back out to Oregon when I was 2, so I don't really remember it. But my parents are enjoying being back here." – **Robbie Ziegler**, of Portland, Ore., on returning to Colorado this week

"It's a beautiful course, the greens are phenomenal. It's probably in the best shape of any course I have ever played. It's a great finish for match play. You've got both par 5s (15 and 16), which are good risk-reward holes. It should make for good finishes coming down the stretch." – **Brandon Dalinka**, of New York, N.Y., on Colorado Golf Club

"If I keep driving it the way I drove it today, I think I am going to be tough to beat because I've got a good feel with the putter and the greens are so pure. If you just get a good read, you are going to make a lot [of putts]. So I am confident." – **Paul McNamara**, of Dallas, Texas, on his mindset going into match play

"Hopefully about 10 hours of sleep and lot of water. The tougher the course the more I like my chances and so with a full battery tomorrow we are going to give them hell." – **Marc Engellenner**, of Rocklin, Calif., on his preparations for match play

"I love the golf course, it's beautiful. I love how firm it is. When you work and have a family, you don't get to play firm and fast very much, so it's super fun to play. You have to think more than just it's 150 [yards] and hit it at it." – 2008 U.S. Amateur runner-up **Drew Kittleson**, of Scottsdale, Ariz., on Colorado Golf Club

"I'm kind of anxious to see which seed I get. I would love to be on the top half of the draw, just to make Tuesday a little bit easier. But at the end of the day, I feel like this is a bonus to be here anyway. It just

happened to fit into the schedule. So, push comes to shove, hopefully I either play well enough to get there and make it a problem, or we won't even have to deal with it. I'm not looking too far ahead to that. I've got to get there first." – **Garrett Rank**, of Canada, who is assigned to referee an NHL exhibition game Tuesday night at the Pepsi Center in downtown Denver. The 2012 Mid-Amateur runner-up is entering his fourth season as a full-time NHL referee.

"In this tournament, if you get around in 36 holes at even par you are going to be fine and you are going to be playing [on Monday]. It's great to be medalist but that's never the thought unless it kind of happens." – 2017 champion **Matt Parziale**, of Brockton, Mass., on his mindset for stroke play

"Each day I think I got to 2 over [par] and immediately followed with a couple of birdies. Today I was at 2 over twice and made two birdies pretty quick. It makes me feel good. I know it is there. It's not quite as sharp as I want it to be, but it is close." – 2014 champion **Scott Harvey**, of Greensboro, N.C., assessing his performance