

Stewart Hagestad Rolls Into U.S. Mid-Amateur Quarterfinals

By David Shefter, USGA

What Happened

Stewart Hagestad may have arrived at Colorado Golf Club for the 39th U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship emotionally fatigued and a bit travel-weary less than a week after helping the USA retain the Walker Cup at Royal Liverpool in England.

But after a few days in the rarified air of suburban Denver, the 28-year-old from Newport Beach, Calif., appears to have recharged his batteries. The 2016 Mid-Amateur champion, who went 2-1 in the Walker Cup with a Sunday singles victory, marched into the quarterfinals on Tuesday with a pair of convincing victories.

On a breezy day – winds gusted to as high as 30 mph in some portions of the course – Hagestad defeated John Ehgott, 44, of Peoria, Ill., in the Round of 16 and Blake Parks, 34, of Odessa, Texas, in the Round of 32, both by 5-and-4 margins. Through three rounds of match play, Hagestad, a semifinalist in 2018, has played just 43 holes, and is a combined 7 under par, with the usual concessions.

“I know the whole way through, from here on out, you’re getting everyone’s best,” said Hagestad, who is the world’s top-ranked mid-amateur and No. 6 overall in the World Amateur Golf Ranking™. “They’re throwing everything they have at you. There’s a lot of golf left, and you’ve got to kind of take it one match at a time and a hole at a time and all the adages that go with it. But everyone that’s here is really good. So, you can’t really take anything for granted.”

Nick Geyer, 32, of San Diego, Calif., was equally as impressive, needing just 29 holes to eliminate Maxwell Scodro, of Chicago, Ill., 4 and 3 (Round of 16) and Jonathan Bale, of Wales, 5 and 4 (Round of 32) to set up a quarterfinal showdown with Hagestad. Geyer, a lefty who regained his amateur status in 2013, has gained a lot of momentum after claiming the second-to-last spot in the draw via an 18-for-6 playoff on Monday morning.

“It feels awesome,” said Geyer, a University of New Mexico graduate, of his run. “This is why I got my amateur status back in 2013. I think the USGA does an unbelievable job, and the feeling that you get being out here playing and competing, that’s why I love golf, whether it’s something small or something huge. Yes, it feels awesome.”

Two international players also are among the final eight. Andres Schonbaum, 28, of Argentina, who played his college golf at Jacksonville (Ala.) State and was a quarterfinalist a year ago, is joined by Lukas Michel, 25, of Australia.

Schonbaum, who runs his own insurance agency, avenged a 19-hole quarterfinal defeat to eventual 2018 champion Kevin O’Connell, 30, of Jacksonville, Fla., in the Round of 32 by, ironically, going 19 holes. He then defeated Johnny DelPrete, 30, of Juno Beach, Fla., 2 and 1, winning holes 16 and 17 to close it out.

“I knew it was going to be hard because Kevin is such a great player, not only for winning last year,” said Schonbaum, who is playing in his third Mid-Amateur. “So, I knew it was a challenge for me because he

beat me last year, even though it was pretty close. But yeah, I just fought for it, and yeah, I was really proud of that one.”

Michel, who took advantage of a new World Amateur Golf Ranking category that exempts the first 30 age-eligible players (he is currently No. 287), edged local Nick Nosewicz, 36, of Aurora, Colo., 2 and 1, in the morning and Michigan State assistant men’s golf coach Dan Ellis, of Lansing, Mich., 4 and 3 in the afternoon.

He’ll face Jacob Koppenberg, 32, of Bellingham, Wash., who outlasted playoff survivor Daniel DeBra, of Lutz, Fla., in 19 holes. Koppenberg carried a 1-up lead into the 18th hole, but made a double-bogey 6 to send the match to the par-5 first hole. The volunteer assistant men’s golf coach at Western Washington quickly made amends by having his short birdie putt conceded. Koppenberg also was extended to the 18th hole in his morning match against Jacob Dukeminier, 30, of Beaverton, Ore., prevailing 1 up.

“Oh, this is a dream,” said Koppenberg. “I’ve played pretty hard this year and lost. We had a match-play tournament up in Washington State, lost in the semifinals, so that kind of stung a little bit. So, kind of hoping to redeem myself. It’s a grind, and at this point no one is going to give you a match.”

Joseph Deraney, 36, of Tupelo, Miss., the 2018 and ’19 Canadian Mid-Amateur champion, earned his spot in the quarterfinals by rallying from an early 3-down deficit to defeat No. 5 seed Paul McNamara, 28, of Dallas, Texas, 1 up. A conceded eagle on the par-5 16th hole gave Deraney his first lead since the first hole.

Deraney faces Yaroslav Merkulov, 27, of Penfield, N.Y., after the Duke University graduate pulled away from Jeremy Gearhart, 35, of Atascadero, Calif., 4 and 2. Merkulov, who just regained his amateur status in May, went birdie-eagle-birdie on his final three holes to close out Gearhart, who advanced to the Round of 16 with a 20-hole victory over Todd White, 51, of Spartanburg, S.C.

Jason Schultz, meanwhile, needed to convert a short birdie putt on No. 18 to squeak by Jon Olson, 39, of Ankeny, Iowa, 1 up, in the morning before rolling to a 5-and-4 victory over lefty Andrew Rhodes, 34, of Westfield, Ind. This is Schultz’s first USGA championship and first match-play event in two decades.

“I was talking to my friend yesterday, and I said, ‘I don’t think I’ve played match play in 20-plus years,’” said Schultz, who faces Schonbaum on Wednesday morning. “It’s different. I mean, it took me a while yesterday to kind of acclimate myself. But it’s fun. It’s a different approach, but like I said, you kind of just play, pick your spots more than anything.”

What’s Next

Quarterfinal and semifinal matches are scheduled to be played on Wednesday, beginning at 7 a.m. (quarterfinals) and 12:30 p.m. (semis) CDT. The 36-hole final on Thursday will start at 7 a.m. and continue after lunch at 12:30 p.m.

Notable

Each of the quarterfinalists earn exemptions into the 2020 U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship at Kinloch Golf Club in Manakin-Sabot, Va.

With U.S. Mid-Amateur committeeman **Paul McNamara Sr.** still on caddie duty for his son, **Paul Jr.**, who advanced to the final 16, USGA Rules of Golf associate **Daniela Lendl** was given his spot to referee the Round-of-16 match between **Nick Geyer** and **Maxwell Scodro**.

Geyer, of San Diego, Calif., is the fifth player to reach the quarterfinals out of a playoff since 2010, joining **Sam O'Dell** (2018), **Josh Irving** (2017), **Tony Behrstock** (2011) and **Tim Mickelson** (2010).

Geyer also has a chance to become the third No. 63 seed to win a USGA championship, the last of which came in Colorado where **Stephen Fox** won the 2012 U.S. Amateur. The other 63 seed to take home a title is **Clay Ogden** in the 2005 U.S. Amateur Public Links. The USGA began seeding match-play fields in 1985.

Lukas Michel, of Australia, has a mechanical engineering degree (2017) from the University of Melbourne.

Quarterfinalist **Jason Schultz**, of Allen, Texas, played two years on the PGA Tour (2006-07) after winning the 2005 Chattanooga Classic on the Nationwide Tour (now Korn Ferry Tour). This is the 1996 University of Missouri graduate's first USGA championship after regaining his amateur status in 2017.

Johnny DelPrete, 30, of Juno Beach, Fla., had quite the finish in the Round of 32 against medalist **Ben Warnquist**, of Gaithersburg, Md. DelPrete went eagle-eagle-birdie in the 2-and-1 victory. The two eagles came on the par-5 15th and 16th holes, respectively, with a 6-iron from 212 yards to 6 feet on 15 and another 6-iron from 238 yards to 30 feet on 16. He hit a 7-iron to 6 inches on the 204-yard 17th for a conceded birdie. "Tough to beat," said Warnquist. "I don't know what to do against that."

Quotable

"It's all about my attitude because I tend to get a little bit pissed, so I just want to [be focused] for the next shot. It's a long tournament, so I'm going to miss [shots], but I want to miss in the right places. I know I'm playing well, so I know at some point I'll do things right." – **Andres Schonbaum**, of Argentina, on his mindset

"It's a little firmer. Other guys may feel differently. I kind of felt like after [the Walker Cup in] England that I had kind of a different perspective on it where I kind of embraced it. You know it's going to be firm and fast, and you just can't be quite as aggressive. But it's not like you could be super aggressive this morning. [The wind] was just another factor that you really had to pay attention to. But I don't think it was a huge thing, if that makes sense." – 2016 champion and two-time USA Walker Cup competitor **Stewart Hagestad**, of Newport Beach, Calif., on the conditions

"Yeah, [hole] 12 was big. Made like a 7-footer to win the hole, and I was freaking out over that hole just because it was like 25-mile-an-hour winds, and the greens were rolling like at 12 [feet on the Stimpmeter]. I couldn't get my ball to settle, and I'm like, I don't know how I'm going to hit this putt. And then after that, finished with birdie-eagle-birdie ... and that's just kind of hard to beat." – **Yaroslav Merkulov**, of Penfield, N.Y., on the turning point of his 4-and-2 victory in the Round of 16

"I'm excited. I've been playing pretty solid over the last little while, and I had to miss a PGA Tour [event] this week because I was here, so I surely didn't want to lose early because you don't get too many opportunities to play a PGA event. Yeah, I'm excited. Right now, my thoughts are I'm hungry and I'm tired and 'going to go sit down and take it easy and go try again tomorrow morning.'" – **Joe Deraney**, of

Tupelo, Miss., who had a sponsor's exemption into this week's Sanderson Farms Championship in Jackson, Miss., by virtue of winning this year's Mississippi Amateur

"Oh, man, you don't want to get old, so cherish your low 20s and stuff. But this is the funnest tournament. These guys are former pros, former [college] All-Americans. I mean, the pedigree here is unbelievable. And then everyone is just a little bit more laid back. I think you've got life a little bit more figured out. [We] have jobs, kids, families. This is my favorite tournament I look forward to every year, and I would tell these college guys, if you're not going to turn pro, don't chase it; keep the club in your hand because when you turn 25 you've got years to play in this thing. I would hope they look forward to something like this if they stay amateur." – **Jacob Koppenberg**, a volunteer assistant coach at Western Washington University, on what he would tell his players about the U.S. Mid-Amateur

"I'd been playing well leading into the event, but any time you've got 264 players to get down to the top 8 is always going to be a challenge. I'm obviously pleased with how far I've got so far, and looking forward to hopefully continuing." – **Lukas Michel**, of Australia

"I've got a lot of math going right now, between elevation, the heat, the firmness of the golf course, and then, yeah, wind. No shortage of math out here." – **Nick Geyer**, of San Diego, Calif., on figuring out his yardages in not only the altitude, but breezy conditions

"I think as much as anything, as it relates to the Masters in particular, playing it – and I think the other champions would probably say this, too – playing it one time, the taste of it, as amazing as it is, it just makes you want to do it more. So, I mean, yeah, the Masters, U.S. Open, obviously. This year was just incredible. It was fulfilling dreams." – **Kevin O'Connell**, of Jacksonville, Fla., reflecting on his past year as the U.S. Mid-Amateur champion

"It's validating to beat a lot of good players in the two rounds of stroke play. I think I'll take more confidence in the future and try and carry a little more confidence into the tournament if I make it. [But] at the end of the day, whether you finish top 32, top 16, top eight, nobody cares. I'll be back doing my job selling insurance [on Wednesday] probably, trying to find a flight tonight. So it's first or bust at the end of the day for me. It's not like I didn't have a great experience, because I enjoyed the heck out of the week. But yeah, in the future, I'd like to make it deep and give myself a chance to win the tournament." – medalist **Ben Warnquist**, of Gaithersburg, Md., summing up his week after a 2-and-1 loss in the Round of 32

"As long as I can change my flight, I will be in the classroom tomorrow morning at 8." – **Todd White**, a history teacher at Spartanburg (S.C.) High School, after losing in 20 holes in the Round of 32

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