

Lukas Michel to Face Joseph Deraney in U.S. Mid-Amateur Final

By David Shefter, USGA

What Happened

In 38 previous U.S. Mid-Amateur Championships, no foreign-born player has claimed the title. Three have managed to reach the final match, the last being Garrett Rank seven years ago, but Lukas Michel, of Australia, has a chance on Thursday to make history.

Michel, 25, earned his spot in the 36-hole championship match by ousting 2016 champion Stewart Hagestad, 28, of Newport Beach, Calif., 2 up, in the semifinals on Wednesday afternoon at Colorado Golf Club. His opponent will be Joseph Deraney, 36, of Tupelo, Miss., who eliminated Jason Schultz, 46, of Allen, Texas, 1 up, in the other semifinal match.

The final is scheduled to begin at 7 a.m. CDT and will resume after lunch at 12:30 p.m., with the champion receiving an exemption into the 2020 U.S. Open at Winged Foot Golf Club.

Michel is the third Australian to reach a USGA final in 2019, joining U.S. Women's Amateur champion Gabriela Ruffels and U.S. Senior Women's Amateur runner-up Sue Wooster.

Much like Tuesday, the competitors faced breezy conditions for most of the day, which included quarterfinal and semifinal matches. But fortunately, a nearby thunderstorm broke up and never caused a suspension of play.

Michel, who grew up in Perth (Western Australia), is accustomed to playing in the wind, and the No. 281 golfer in the World Amateur Golf Ranking™ grabbed a 3-up lead after nine holes on Hagestad, the No. 5 player in the WAGR and top-ranked mid-amateur.

But Hagestad, coming off helping the USA to a victory in the Walker Cup Match at Royal Liverpool in England, slowly chipped away at his deficit and eventually took a 1-up lead with a birdie on the par-5 15th hole. Michel rebounded with a gorgeous 5-iron approach to 10 feet, setting up a two-putt birdie to tie the match. Hagestad then got confused by the swirling wind on the 210-yard, par-3 17th tee and missed the green with his tee shot, leading to a bogey. Michel two-putted for par and took a 1-up lead to 18.

A good drive and approach left the Australian with a 15-footer for birdie. Hagestad, however, found a fairway bunker and his second with a 7-iron flew the green, leading to a tricky and fast downhill pitch and run. Michel lagged his putt to 2 feet, and when Hagestad failed to convert his par putt, he conceded.

"It wasn't that far off," said Hagestad of his tee shot on 18. "I mean, as my body begins to get tired, I have a tendency to tug it left. Just hit a little heely one that had the bunker maybe not been there, probably would've cut back to the middle of the fairway.

"I hit an awesome second shot; right in between clubs. I mean, [my] adrenaline is pumping, but I don't know about that. Maybe in retrospect I should have tried to nuke an 8[- iron]."

Deraney also saw a 3-up lead on the second nine dwindle to 1 against Schultz. Schultz hit a remarkable recovery shot to 8 feet from gnarly rough on No. 13 to set up a winning birdie, and the University of Missouri graduate won the par-5 16th with a par.

On 18, Deraney, a stay-at-home dad, blistered his drive 50 yards past Schultz, but it was the Texan who wound up closer to the flagstick after their approach shots. Deraney carefully lagged his putt to 2 feet for a par. Schultz, needing to convert to force extra holes, failed to convert from 12 feet.

“It wasn’t my best putt,” said Schultz. “At least I had a chance. For a while [in the match], it wasn’t looking like I was going to have a chance. At least I had a putt to try to extend it. That’s all I can ask for.”

Added Deraney, a Mississippi State University graduate: “I’m very excited. Just to get to play in USGA events is special treat. We all typically count how many we’ve played in, right? So it’s a special treat. To play so well is something really fantastic.”

In the morning quarterfinals, Michel needed 20 holes to eliminate Jacob Koppenberg, 32, of Bellingham, Wash., after seeing a 4-up lead with five to play evaporate. Koppenberg made two birdies and an eagle before winning the 18th hole with a par to force extra holes. After both players birdied the par-5 19th hole – Hole 1 at Colorado Golf Club – Michel prevailed by two-putting for par from 20 feet on the 152-yard, par-3 20th.

Deraney, meanwhile, defeated Yaroslav Merkulov, 27, of Penfield, N.Y., 2 and 1. Hagestad played the equivalent of 5-under golf – with concessions – to eliminate No. 63 seed Nick Geyer, 32, of San Diego, Calif., while Schultz defeated Andres Schonbaum, 28, of Argentina, 3 and 2.

Notable

The two semifinal losers (Schultz and Hagestad) each earned a two-year exemption to the U.S. Mid-Amateur. Hagestad, by virtue of his 2016 victory, is exempt through the 2026 championship. The 2020 championship will be contested at Kinloch Golf Club in Manakin-Sabot, Va., and the 2021 competition is set for Sankaty Head Golf Club on Nantucket Island in Massachusetts.

William Davenport, of Palm City, Fla., who lost to **Stewart Hagestad** in the Round of 64, took over caddie duties for **Lukas Michel**.

Joseph Deraney has employed a club caddie, **Sadie LeCheminant**, since match play commenced on Monday.

Nick Geyer was the only quarterfinalist not to use a caddie.

The 20-hole quarterfinal match between **Michel** and **Jacob Koppenberg** tied for the fifth-longest in the Round of 8 in championship history.

When **Hagestad** lost the par-3 second hole in his quarterfinal match against **Geyer**, it was the first time he had trailed in 45 holes.

Hagestad’s match-play record in the U.S. Mid-Amateur is now 14-3.

Quotable

"I knew I was still playing well. Like, he was the one that kind of ate into my lead. I think he was like 4 under [over] three [consecutive] holes on the back nine. I was 1 under and I lost three of them. You kind of just got to ignore that stuff and keep playing your own game. I think that's what I did." – **Lukas Michel**, of Australia, on losing a 4-up lead with five to play, but still prevailing in 20 holes over **Jacob Koppenberg** in the quarterfinals

"I mean, yeah, a spot at the U.S. Open and [a likely] invite to the Masters. Pros can play their whole life and not get that opportunity. Nothing gets better than that I don't think." – **Michel** on the perks that go to the champion

"So I can answer that question pretty quickly: zero. It's going to be just like today. It's 36 holes. I'll have to figure out how to focus on the first 18 and not just be like, let's get it over so we can get to the show, the last 18 holes. So just play solidly. I'm going to play the golf course; you know, try to eliminate mistakes, make the other person make birdies. They're kind of hard to come by in spots out here. Try to stay rested. Get some food. Hopefully come the back nine I've got a shot." – **Joseph Deraney**, of Tupelo, Miss., on his mindset for the 36-hole championship match

"Winning always feels good. There's a lot of guys who are good, but it's tough to win at any level, especially as you get older. As you go from high school to college, you win less and less. So [winning the events I have this year] has definitely carried momentum over [to this week]." – **Deraney** on how his strong 2019 summer has carried over to the U.S. Mid-Amateur

"I'm super bummed to be that close. I mean, I really like this golf course. I played great the whole week, had a lot of confidence going into it. I played great the whole week. I knew that this would be my toughest match, especially after the way I played this morning. Tough to kind of back it up after you go out and pretty much go lights out (shoot 5 under in beating Nick Geyer). The only thing to say is [I've] just got to play better." – 2016 champion **Stewart Hagestad**, of Newport Beach, Calif., on losing in the semifinals for the second consecutive year

"Adrenaline does a lot, so I didn't feel it as much (fatigue) as I was thinking I was. I kind of paced myself a little bit, too. Probably wasn't the fastest round of golf that I've ever played, but I felt like I just kind of took it as a stroll and see what would happen." – **Jason Schultz**, of Allen, Texas, on playing his fifth match in three days

"It was great. Awesome. Obviously, I would've loved to get one more, two more wins, but I don't play much golf, so this is a lot of fun. It's fun to be competing and actually have a little bit of success." – **Schultz** on reaching the semis in his first USGA championship

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