

Bob Royak Defeats Roger Newsom, 1 Up, to Claim 65th U.S. Senior Amateur Title

By David Shefter, USGA

What Happened

No birdies, no problem.

Bob Royak, 57, of Alpharetta, Ga., knows the Frederick L. Dold Trophy won't have his scorecard engraved from Thursday's 18-hole championship match of the 65th U.S. Senior Amateur Championship at Old Chatham Golf Club. But his name will be on the silver cup after a hard-fought, 1-up victory over Roger Newsom, 55, of Virginia Beach, Va.

Royak, making his fourth start in the championship and 16th USGA championship overall, is the second player in the last three U.S. Senior Amateur finals to claim the title without a birdie in the championship match. Sean Knapp had a similar outcome two years ago at The Minikahda Club in Minneapolis, Minn., when he denied Paul Simson a third title, 2 and 1.

Royak also becomes the third player from Georgia to win the Senior Amateur, joining Jackie Cummings (1999), of Columbus, and his U.S. Amateur Four-Ball partner, Doug Hanzel (2013), of Savannah.

"To be a USGA champion, to think that your name is going up on the wall [in the Hall of Champions] in Far Hills, [N.J., at the USGA Museum] with the other champions for 2019, that's kind of beyond belief," said Royak. "I don't know when they put [the plaque] up, but I'll go up there sometime next year, maybe I am in New York and get over there and see it."

The match came down to the 18th hole, which statistically was the toughest during the stroke-play portion of the competition last weekend (4.67 average). Neither player found the green in regulation despite hitting the fairway on the 470-yard downhill par-4. After Royak's 226-yard approach with a 19-degree hybrid was slightly pulled just left of the green, Newsom followed with what he called one of his worst swings of the week. He caught a 5-iron from 195 yards a bit heavy and the ball nestled down in the bermudagrass rough short and left of the green.

All day Newsom had been spot-on with recovery shots – he nearly holed chips on Nos. 5 and 7 – but this time the ball came up 34 feet short. Royak followed with an exquisite chip and run with his 50-degree wedge to 5 feet.

"I had two choices," said Royak of his mindset. "My initial thought was I was going to take my sand wedge and I was going to fly it to the ridge. So, I had maybe 20 feet to the top of the ridge and then it leveled off. I either had to go way high and just stop it around the hole or go low and run it up the hill. I figured if I went low, I could get it within six feet."

When Newsom missed, Royak took some time looking over the line before holing his par putt. Seconds after the ball disappeared to the pleasure of 100 or so spectators, Royak dropped his putter and waved both hands in the air. Then he bent down and collected his thoughts for a few seconds, trying to grasp the accomplishment.

"Relief. Done. Yeah, it's hard to describe [what it is] to be a USGA champion," said Royak. "You think about it [the night before] and even this morning before you tee off what it means, and when it finally happens, it's like, 'Whoo,' relief."

Newsom, who had recorded just 14 bogeys in 121 holes of golf prior to the championship match, registered five – with two birdies – on Thursday. He just couldn't overcome the mistakes after making so few en route to the final.

"It was a good match," said Newsom, who became eligible for this championship in March when he turned 55. "Back and forth, back and forth; I kind of gave too many [holes away] today. I gave more than what I had given away the first [five] matches."

Newsom bogeyed the par-5 opening hole to go 1 down, but managed to make seven consecutive pars before converting consecutive birdies on Nos. 9 and 10. Two holes later, he failed to get up and down for par – he lipped out an 8-foot par putt – while Royak played a perfect pitch with a 9-iron to 3 feet for a winning par to tie the match. A poor drive by Newsom led to another bogey on No. 13, and when Royak converted a 6-foot comebacker for par, he went 1 up.

The match remained that way until the 17th hole. Royak three-putted for bogey, missing a 5-footer, to lose the hole, setting the scene for No. 18.

"All week actually," said Royak, who advanced by making few mistakes (only 16 bogeys, including two in the final) rather than a lot of birdies. "I'd love to count up the number of birdies I made. How many holes did I play? I have no idea (it was 134). I probably made less than 10 birdies (actually 13), which is unusual. I usually get on a roll and can make a lot of birdies."

This week, par was good enough.

What the Champion Receives

Bob Royak earned the following for winning the 65th U.S. Senior Amateur Championship:

- A gold medal
- Custody of the Frederick L. Dold Trophy for one year
- Exemptions into the next 10 U.S. Senior Amateur Championships
- Exemption into the 2020 U.S. Senior Open at Newport (R.I.) Country Club, where he'll be paired with reigning champion Steve Stricker and The R&A's Senior Open champion Bernhard Langer
- Exemptions into the next two U.S. Amateur Championships: 2020 at Bandon Dunes Golf Resort in Bandon, Ore. and 2021 at Oakmont (Pa.) Country Club
- Exemptions into the next two U.S. Mid-Amateur Championships: 2019 at Colorado Golf Club in Parker, Colo., and 2020 at Kinloch Golf Club in Richmond, Va.
- Exemption from local qualifying for the 2020 U.S. Open Championship at Winged Foot Golf Club in Mamaroneck, N.Y.

Notable

Runner-up **Roger Newsom** received a silver medal and an exemption into the next three U.S. Senior Amateur Championships. He also earns a spot in the 2020 U.S. Senior Open, the 2020 U.S. Amateur and next month's U.S. Mid-Amateur.

Newsom, who is an eye surgeon and ophthalmologist, is unsure if he'll accept the exemption into the U.S. Mid-Amateur. It all depends, he said, on his work/surgery schedule. He did play Bandon Dunes when the U.S. Mid-Amateur was conducted there in 2007.

Newport Country Club, site of the 2020 U.S. Senior Open, is one of the five founding clubs of the USGA. It hosted the inaugural U.S. Open and U.S. Amateur in 1895 and was the site of **Tiger Woods'** second of three consecutive U.S. Amateur titles in 1995. **Annika Sorenstam** won her third and final U.S. Women's Open titles at Newport in 2006

Next year's U.S. Senior Amateur will be conducted at the Country Club of Detroit in Grosse Pointe Farms, Mich., from Aug. 29-Sept. 3. It was the host site for the 1915 and 1954 U.S. Amateurs, the latter of which was won by **Arnold Palmer**.

Bob Royak gave himself an early birthday present. He turns 58 in 10 days (Sept. 9).

Jack Royak, Bob's older brother who served as his caddie all week, played college golf at Siena College in Loudonville, N.Y., but three back surgeries have prevented him from competing anymore. **Paul Royak**, who lives in Tampa, Fla., flew home earlier in the week after failing to qualify for match play here. The two brothers competed in the same USGA championship for the first time since the 2004 U.S. Mid-Amateur. Both played at the University of Tampa.

Jerry Lee, who coached **Roger Newsom** at East Carolina University, came to watch the championship match. Also supporting Newsom on Thursday was **Charles S. McDowell**, a Pine Valley member who defeated **Jay Sigel**, 2 up, in the 1961 U.S. Junior Amateur final at the Cornell University Golf Course in Ithaca, N.Y. Sigel went on to win two U.S. Amateurs, three U.S. Mid-Amateurs and represent the USA on a record-nine Walker Cup Teams. McDowell resides in Wilmington, Del.

Terry Heath, who qualified for the 1994 U.S. Mid-Amateur at Hazeltine Country Club and the 2005 U.S. Senior Open at NCR Club, was in attendance to support **Royak**, his former teammate at Guilderland (N.Y.) High School, a suburb of Albany.

Golf Channel insider and award-winning golf writer **Jaime Diaz**, who lives in the Pinehurst area, was among the notable spectators, along with two-time US. Senior Amateur champion and Raleigh, N.C., resident **Paul Simson**. Simson was eliminated in the Round of 32 by fellow North Carolinian **Steve Harwell**.

Quotable

"December and January are one of my favorite times of the year because I look forward to the [competition] schedule and map out my USGA events. Okay, where is the [U.S.] Senior Open qualifier, where is the [U.S.] Senior Amateur qualifier, where is the [U.S.] Mid-Amateur qualifier, and where are the tournaments at? I picture those events. I'm going to be at Notre Dame [for the 2019 U.S. Senior Open]. I'm going to be at Old Chatham. When I knew that was on the schedule, I'm going, 'Okay, I can drive there.' It's going to be [on] bermudagrass. It's going to fit my game." – **Bob Royak** on setting his schedule

"I think if you looked at the guys who played best here [at Old Chatham], probably most of them were southeastern [U.S.] kind of guys. The turf here, it's not easy to play on." – **Royak** on being accustomed to playing on bermudagrass, a warm-season turf

"Very special. I've played in two [U.S. Senior Opens], so it won't be a shock to the system now. I've gotten to play with [PGA Tour Champions players] Esteban Toledo and Paul Broadhurst this past year,

and [I] played with Tom Watson [at Indianwood Golf and Country Club near] Detroit. So that was a thrill.” – **Royak** on getting a return trip to the U.S. Senior Open next year

“Growing up, [Jack] Nicklaus was always big; probably my favorite player. And then as I got [older] – when Tiger [Woods] hit the tracks – he’s the guy that I love to watch play.” – **Royak** on who he emulated as a player growing up

“I hadn't had a fat shot like that the whole time. Where that came from, I don't know. I guess it's just nerves.” – **Roger Newsom** on his 5-iron approach to the 18th hole

“Well, I've had some calls, so I think they're following me.” – **Newsom** when asked if any of his patients were following his play this week

“I think I trust my golf game more. The more you play in these things and you do okay, you just build trust in your game.” – **Newsom** on what he learned this week

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