**Two Sides Shoot 62 to Share First-Round Lead at Bandon Dunes**

**WHAT HAPPENED**

BANDON, Ore. – A father-son tandem and a pair of former college teammates, both of whom got into the field as alternates, battled rain and chilly temperatures to card 62s in Saturday’s first round of stroke play in the 5th U.S. Amateur Four-Ball Championship at Bandon Dunes Golf Resort.

John Sajevic, 63, of Fremont, Neb., and his 28-year-old son, Andrew, of Omaha, Neb., joined ex-Davidson (N.C.) College teammates Ralph Blasey, 26, of Bethesda, Md., and Alex Nianouris, 25, of Raleigh, N.C., with 8-under-par 62s on Pacific Dunes.

The scores matched the 18-hole championship record held by three other sides.

Recent Santa Clara University graduates Matthew McCarty, 21, of Scottsdale, Ariz., and Derek Ackerman, 22, of Santa Clara, Calif., posted the lowest score on Old Macdonald, an 8-under-par 63.

The Pacific Dunes and Old Macdonald courses are being used for the stroke-play portion of the competition. Following Sunday’s second round, the field of 128 sides will be cut to the low 32 sides for match play, which will be conducted exclusively on Old Macdonald.

Although the winds were relatively calm, the competitors played in temperatures hovering in the low 50s with intermittent rain showers. But without heavy breezes, good scores were possible as 26 sides posted 65 or better.

John and Andrew Sajevic, first alternates from the Nebraska City, Neb., sectional last fall, were contacted two weeks ago by the USGA when defending champions Cole Hammer and Garrett Barber withdrew due to a conflict with the ongoing NCAA Championships. Given a second chance, the side registered nine birdies against one bogey. Andrew had the two highlight moments, converting two long birdies putts: a 30-footer on No. 1 and a 70-foot double-breaker from the front of the green on No. 14.

“Anytime you can go play in this one, especially with your dad, it’s pretty special,” said Andrew, who often competes against his dad in Nebraska events.

Blasey and Nianouris found out they were in the field in January after losing a 2-for-1 playoff for the final qualifying spot at their Urbana, Md., sectional qualifier last September. They birdied six of the last seven holes that day to get into the playoff.

Blasey opened their first USGA championship round by converting a 15-footer for birdie and Nianouris ended it with a 25-foot birdie putt.

“Ralph gave me a good read,” said Nianouris, a 2016 graduate who played three seasons at Davidson with Blasey (2015 grad). “I relied on him all day for that.”

Added Blasey: “We birdied the first hole, so it was a pretty fun start. The good vibes were going. We hammed-and-egged it really well.”

Ackerman and McCarty came into the championship with previous experience at Bandon Dunes, having played a college event here last year. Both felt comfortable with the venues, and it showed. Ackerman produced three of the side’s three second-nine birdies, including a 30-footer on 14 that hit the flagstick and dropped.

They’ll move over to Pacific Dunes on Sunday when conditions could get much more challenging. Winds are expected to gust between 20 and 25 mph by the afternoon.

“We are going to have the same mentality tomorrow,” said Ackerman of their mindset for the final round of stroke play. “Go out there and have fun and make as many birdies as possible. Hit greens, hit fairways and just make it as easy as possible on ourselves.”

**NOTABLE**

**Keith Guest**, 34, of Athens, Ga., played as a solo side after his partner, Don Carpenter, of Athens, Ga., had to withdraw with an ankle injury. Guest shot an even-par 71 on Old Macdonald. Four years ago, a similar situation occurred, ironically to another Georgian. **David Knoll Jr.** suffered a thumb injury prior to the championship at The Olympic Club, so **Cameron Hooper** competed as a solo side.

Recently retired NFL defensive tackle **Kyle Williams**, 35, of Ruston, La., and his partner, **Greg Berthelot**, 30, of Baton Rouge, La., carded a 4-under 66 on Pacific Dunes.

**Nathan Smith**, 40, of Pittsburgh, Pa., and **Todd White**,51, of Spartanburg, S.C., the inaugural winners of this championship in 2015, shot an even-par 71 on Old Macdonald.

Last year’s runners-up, **Chip Brooke**, 43, of Altamonte Springs, Fla., and **Marc Dull**, 33, of Winter Haven, Fla., posted a 5-under 65 on Pacific Dunes. Brooke is a former Bandon Dunes caddie and his father is a past caddie master at the resort.

**Troy Vannucci**, 27, and his partner **Vince Kwon**, 25, both of Marlton, N.J., birdied four consecutive holes from No. 14 to post a 7-under 64 on Old Macdonald.

2016 runners-up **Brandon Cigna,** 33, of Arlington, Va., and **Ben Warnquist,** 26, of Olney, Md., opened with a 5-under 66 on Old Macdonald. Warnquist hit a 252-yard, 3-wood approach on the par-5 17th hole to the left edge of the green and holed the 45-foot eagle putt.

**Scott Harvey**, 40, of Kernersville, N.C., and **Todd Mitchell**,40, of Bloomington, Ill., semifinalists in 2015 and quarterfinalists in 2017, posted a 6-under 65. Harvey won the 2014 U.S. Mid-Amateur and represented the USA on the 2015 Walker Cup Team.

**QUOTABLE**

“There’s nothing like that. We’re just so fortunate to be able to do that. We actually play against each other a lot in Nebraska. And then when you play together … it’s special. I’m a lucky guy.” – **John Sajevic** on playing in his second U.S. Amateur Four-Ball with his talented son, Andrew.

“It feels pretty good. We came into the round not knowing what to expect with the weather. We heard in the players’ meetings that a 62 was out there and we were kind of thinking that when we got on a little bit of a run and made a few birdies on the front nine. On the last four or five holes, we both had real good birdies looks and we were able to drop in the majority of them.” – **Derek Ackerman** after shooting a 63 on Old Macdonald with partner **Matthew McCarty**

“He (Derek Ackerman) calmed me down. That’s the good thing about this format, being out there with one of your best friends is a lot of fun. We are pretty comfortable with each other at this point.” – **McCarty** on playing in his first USGA championship

“We have seen all these spots out here before. I have been here twice and [my brother Hunter] has been here three times. We are very grateful to our dad bringing us up here.” – **Ryder Epson**, 22, of Long Beach, Calif., on previously playing at Bandon Dunes Golf Resort. The Epson brothers shot a 7-under 64 on Old Macdonald

“Our [Bandon Dunes] caddies know our games pretty well. I probably would have missed five of the putts I made today if I didn’t have them read it. The numbers they are having us play and where they are having us hit it, it makes a difference.” – **Hunter Epson,** 21, of Long Beach, Calif. He and his brother employed the same caddies on previous trips to the resort.

“This is as close as you can get for the typical golfer. It’s so different. You have not seen anything like it. It is so much fun to play and the greens are so interesting. They make the golf fun and challenging.” – **Cullen Brasfield,** of San Diego, Calif., on Old Macdonald and Pacific Dunes. Brasfield and partner **Tyler Moore**, 22, of Escondido, Calif., shot a 64 on Old Macdonald.

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