

Hagestad, Tilley Share First-Round Lead at 38th U.S. Mid-Amateur

By David Shefter, USGA

WHAT HAPPENED

Some USGA competitors talk about being medalist in hushed tones, or simply want to ignore such chatter altogether. They know in a match-play competition, being the No. 1 seed can put an undesirable bull's-eye on their back.

Bradford Tilley, 35, of Easton, Conn., understands that. He was the medalist last year only to suffer a disappointing 20-hole quarterfinal defeat to eventual champion Matt Parziale in which he led by five holes with 10 to play.

"Of course, you want to be medalist," said Tilley. "[The USGA] gives out a really nice medal for that."

Southern California native Stewart Hagestad, the 2016 U.S. Mid-Amateur champion, has never been medalist in two previous Mid-Amateur appearances, but isn't bothered by such rhetoric.

"Go win the damn thing. Go win medalist," said Hagestad, who was the medalist in last week's Crump Cup at Pine Valley Golf Club, only to lose in the quarterfinals. "I am not going to put additional pressure on myself to go out and do it, but it is definitely a goal."

Hagestad, 27, of Newport Beach, and Tilley both took strong steps toward achieving medalist honors in the 38th U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship on Saturday, shooting 4-under 67s at Charlotte Country Club. They are one stroke clear of Rob Laird, 31, of Tulsa, Okla., and Jacob Koppenberg, 31, of Bellingham, Wash., both of whom carded 68s at Charlotte Country Club.

The low score posted at stroke-play co-host Carolina Golf Club was a 2-under 69 by Kyle Davies, 27, of Iowa City, Iowa.

Hagestad, who advanced to the Round of 16 at last month's U.S. Amateur at Pebble Beach (Calif.) Golf Links and has qualified for the last two U.S. Opens, registered six birdies against two bogeys. Tilley, a reinstated amateur who now is a software entrepreneur, enjoyed a bogey-free round with birdies on Nos. 2, 7, 10 and 15.

"As far as finishing as medalist [in 2017], it definitely gave me a lot of confidence," said Tilley, who battled a stomach virus during last year's championship. "I don't know if it's something you are aiming to do at the beginning of the week. You've just got to play it one shot at a time in these things because the courses are so difficult.

"But when you get to match play, it doesn't matter if you are the medalist or the 64th seed. Everyone in this field is very good at golf. Anyone can shoot a really low number on any given day. There's not a weak player in this field."

What's Next

Each of the 264 competitors will play one more stroke-play round on Sunday at either Charlotte C.C. or Carolina G.C., after which the field will be trimmed to the low 64 scorers for match play.

Should a playoff be required to determine the final spots in the draw, that would take place Monday morning at Charlotte C.C.

The Round of 64 is scheduled for Monday, followed by two more rounds of match play on Tuesday. The quarterfinals and semifinals will be contested on Wednesday, with the 36-hole final on Thursday.

FS1 will carry the live broadcast of the semifinals and championship match from 4-6 p.m. EDT on Wednesday and Thursday.

Admission to the championship is free.

NOTABLE

- Since its inception in 1981, only five medalists have claimed the title, including **Nathan Smith** twice (2009, 2010).
- Defending champion **Matt Parziale** opened with a 5-over 76 at Carolina Golf Club. Reigning U.S. Senior Amateur champion **Jeff Wilson** posted an even-par 71 at Carolina Golf Club.
- It also was a tough opening day for several other past U.S. Mid-Amateur champions, including four-time winner **Smith**, who carded a 3-over 74 at Charlotte Country Club. **Michael McCoy** (76), **Scott Harvey** (76), **Sammy Schmitz** (78) and **Randal Lewis** (85) all have work to do in Round 2 to make match play. **Josh Nichols**, last year's runner-up, posted an 82 at Carolina Golf Club, while **Brad Nurski**, the runner-up in 2014, shot 78 at Charlotte C.C.
- The stroke average was more than a half-stroke higher at Carolina Golf Club (76.50) than Charlotte Country Club (75.90).
- **Marc Dull**, of Winter Haven, Fla., the runner-up in 2015, joined Koppenberg with a championship-best seven birdies in shooting a 2-under 69 at Charlotte C.C.
- **Todd Mitchell**, of Bloomington, Ill., the 2008 runner-up, birdied five of his first 10 holes at Charlotte C.C. to momentarily take the outright first-round lead, but faltered over his last eight holes, including double-bogey 6 on 18, to post a 70.

QUOTABLE

Stewart Hagestad, of Newport Beach, Calif. (4-under 67 at Charlotte C.C.) on his first-round performance:

"I felt like I was seeing my [putting] lines really, really well and I just had to put good speed, good pace on it. I was in a nice rhythm all day. I hit it well. It was just the kind of stress-free round that you want to have."

Bradford Tilley, of Easton, Conn., (4-under 67 at Charlotte C.C.) on his bogey-free round:

"I played incredibly well. I got away with a few errant shots and you have to in order to put together a round like that. Other than about three shots that were a little bit iffy, the rest were really solid. I tried to keep it below the hole and take advantage of the holes where I had nice tee balls. I made a nice par save on nine and another nice par save on 18 to hold things together."

Tilley on playing through his stomach illness in last year's Mid-Amateur:

"I'm never going to quit or give up. I hate quitting, I hate losing. I will fight to the end. That's the way I was born. Unless there is a stretcher taking me off the course, I wasn't leaving. And that's just my personality."

Rob Laird, of Tulsa, Okla. (3-under 68 at Charlotte C.C.) on his mindset going into Sunday's final round of stroke play:

"Tomorrow's course (Carolina Golf Club) is a little bit different, but it's the same mentality. It's hitting fairways. That course is a little more attackable, so if I can hit the same amount of fairways and keep that mentality, I think the rest will kind of take care of itself. Obviously, I don't need to go shoot the course record. I can play the same way I did today – be conservative but attack with that conservative game plan. Par is OK and if you get a couple [birdies] to drop ... and eliminate the high numbers, you are OK."

Kyle Davies, of Iowa City, Iowa (2-under 69 at Carolina Golf Club) on his bogey-free second nine:

"Kind of a loose driver for most of the day. I was really making up for it with the approach shots. I took advantage when I had a wedge in my hand. I made a few putts, that's kind of how the day went."

Jacob Koppenberg, 31, of Bellingham, Wash. (3-under 68 at Charlotte C.C.) on how being a volunteer men's golf coach at his alma mater, Western Washington University, helps him with his game:

"Their short games are so great, and I love watching these guys chip and how they use their hands. Just seeing some of the fundamentals that these younger guys have helps me."

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