

By David Shefter, USGA

What Happened

Dean Channell didn't think he was going to enjoy a "home" game at the 65th U.S. Senior Amateur Championship when he just missed earning one of the four available spots at a sectional qualifier last month.

But the Cary, N.C., resident held out hope that as a first alternate from the Lexington (S.C.) Country Club qualifier, he might get the chance to compete at Old Chatham Golf Club, a layout he's played "approximately 25 times" since the Rees Jones design opened in 2001.

Earlier this month, the 59-year-old received the coveted phone call from the USGA that he was in the field. Living just 8 miles from the venue, Channell didn't have to make extensive travel plans, and his familiarity with Old Chatham provided a confidence boost.

Those positive vibes were on full display in Saturday's first round of stroke play. Playing in a steady afternoon rain, Channell, a former tennis player at Virginia Tech, carded a 4-under 68 for a two-stroke lead.

He was one of seven players to break par on an overcast day where temperatures were 20 degrees cooler than the two official practice rounds on Thursday and Friday. The rain, which was heavy at times, began falling just as the morning wave of 78 golfers were finishing. Just under a half-inch fell in a five-hour span.

"You rather not play in these conditions," said Channell, "and I am not a mudder. [But] it worked out.

"I really hit it good. I think I hit 15 greens so that makes a difference. I putted well. I hit a lot of shots that were close, so I gave myself a bunch of chances."

Starting on No. 10, Channell, who is competing in his second U.S. Senior Amateur (he missed the cut in 2015 at Hidden Creek after being in a 12-for-1 playoff for the last match-play spot), birdied Nos. 12 and 14 on the outward nine. He chipped in from 20 yards on the par-3 12th and chipped to tap-in range on the par-5 14th. He added birdies on Nos. 2, 3, 6 and 8 on his second nine, making a 15-footer at the sixth and a 25-footer on eight.

Channell wasn't the only alternate to enjoy success on the first day of the championship. Greg Condon, 57, of Monte Vista, Colo., the first alternate from the Albuquerque (N.M.) Country Club qualifier, joined Kory Frost, 62, of Trabuco Canyon, Calif., at 2-under 70.

Condon's 67 at his July 29th qualifier, which offered just one spot, would have earned him medalist honors at all but four of the 49 sectional sites. But he instead needed to survive a playoff to earn first-alternate status. Eleven days later, the USGA called to say he was in the championship for a third consecutive year.

With his 27-year-old son, Luke, on his bag, Condon got off to an inauspicious start with a bogey on the par-5 first hole. But he recovered quickly with a chip-in birdie at the par-3 second. He then made three consecutive birdies on Nos. 5-7 to make the turn at 3-under 33. He came home in 1-over 37.

“It’s damp. It’s wet, but it’s cool compared to the practice rounds,” said Condon, who shared medalist honors with eventual champion Jeff Wilson last year but was eliminated in the Round of 32. “The golf course was great. Hats off to the superintendent (Brian Powell) and the people here who are letting us play in their playground.”

Frost, meanwhile, played the only bogey-free round on Saturday, with birdies on the par-5 first and par-4 16th holes.

Chris Hall, 61, of Marietta, Ga., 2013 U.S. Senior Amateur champion Doug Hanzel, 62, of Savannah, Ga., Pete Williams, 60, of Juno Beach, Fla., and Brian Cain, 57, Montpelier, Vt., all carded 1-under 71s. Hanzel, who started on No. 10, rallied from a 3-over start to shoot 4-under 32 on his second nine.

What’s Next

The 156 competitors will play one more stroke-play round on Sunday after which the field will be trimmed to the low 64 scorers for match play beginning on Monday. Match play continues until Thursday morning’s 18-hole championship match.

Notable

The stroke average for the first round was 77.57, with the 450-yard, par-4 18th playing the most difficult (4.68) and the 503-yard, par-5 14th playing the easiest at 4.96. It was the only hole to play under par on Day 1.

Defending champion **Jeff Wilson**, of Fairfield, Calif., made 17 pars and one bogey en route to a first-round 73. Wilson is vying to become the first back-to-back champion in 39 years. William C. Campbell won the title in 1979 and 1980.

Paul Simson, of Raleigh, N.C., a two-time U.S. Senior Amateur champion (2010 and 2012), had the honor of hitting the opening tee shot. Simson, however, struggled to a 5-over 77, meaning he’ll have some work left on Sunday to avoid missing match play in this event for the first time in 13 appearances. His overall Senior Amateur match-play record is an impressive 33-10. Simson, who has been medalist or co-medalist in this championship a record-tying four times, owned a 71.25 stroke average (24 rounds) coming into the event.

Two-time U.S. Mid-Amateur champion **Tim Jackson**, of Williston, Tenn., withdrew on Friday night due to the passing of his father-in-law. He was replaced in the field by **Rusty Strawn**, of McDonough, Ga., the first alternate from the Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., site.

Ken Kinkopf, of Jupiter, Fla., who won this year’s North & South Senior Amateur at Pinehurst Resort & Country Club, withdrew on Saturday morning with a neck injury and was replaced by **John Hahn**, of Las Vegas, Nev. Hahn won a playoff for first alternate in his sectional qualifier at Red Rock Country Club in Las Vegas. Hahn’s son, also named John, qualified for the 2013 U.S. Open among his nine USGA starts, and won the 2009 Western Amateur.

Two-time USGA champion **Marvin “Vinny” Giles**, 76, of Richmond, Va., the oldest competitor in the field, matched his age with a 4-over 76. He doesn’t know how many times he’s achieved that feat, but said, “I’m at least at 260 and I didn’t start counting until I was 70.” Giles won the 1972 U.S. Amateur and

the 2009 U.S. Senior Amateur. He says this is likely his final Senior Amateur as his 10-year exemption for winning at Beverly Country Club in Chicago ends this year.

Brian Cain, of Montpelier, Vt., had quite a day in his first USGA championship start. Not only was he celebrating his 28th wedding anniversary with wife, **Lilli**, but the 57-year-old also made an eagle-2 on his opening hole, the 368-yard, par-4 10th and nearly aced the 172-yard, par-3 17th, knocking a 5-iron to inches of the hole. On No. 10, he holed out a 9-iron from 135 yards. Cain, who is entering his ninth season as the Montpelier High golf coach, posted a 1-under 71.

This was the first time that **Dean Channell's** wife, Kathy, had watched him play in a competitive event. Kathy came out to watch the last nine holes, where Dean registered four birdies en route to his 68.

Quotable

"Without question it helped me. I am familiar with the shots. It played a lot faster when it first opened so it has changed over the years. But it is nice to look at a green and semi-know what the contour is. You don't have to stress about it." – **Dean Channell** on his familiarity with Old Chatham

"Over the years, I've probably played better golf walking than riding. Maybe it is [more] time to think [between shots]. And your whole life, you've got that timing between shots." – **Greg Condon**, of Monte Vista, Colo., on his preference to walk over riding in the U.S. Senior Amateur

"That's an honor. I think they did that for [North Carolina native] Scott Harvey down at Pinehurst also [for the 2019 U.S. Amateur]. I think that's a really nice gesture. It's something you always will remember, which is kind of cool." – **Paul Simson**, of Raleigh, N.C., on hitting the first tee shot of the championship

"I've kind of been fighting a little neck issue and it's been tough to swing at it. I feel a little bit better than we're in at 77, and maybe if I can get it a little looser tomorrow, we can get us a decent round and get into match play." – **Simson** on his round.

"This will be my last [U.S. Senior Amateur]. I haven't really played with a pencil in my hand since April at the Coleman [Invitational at Seminole Golf Club]. That's the last real tournament I played. I realize that my [competitive] days are over. I still enjoy playing. But I don't have any delusions of grandeur." – **Marvin "Vinny" Giles**, 76, of Richmond, Va., on his expectations this week

"It's the only goal I have anymore. I'm spotting [most of the field] 20 yards and probably 30 or 40 yards." – **Giles** on his quest to qualify for match play

"It was a good score. If you drive it the fairway, with the big greens, you can play. But if you hit in the rough it is a lot of work out there. It is hard to get a club through with it wet and gnarly." – **Michael McCoy**, of Norwalk, Iowa, on the championship setup at Old Chatham

"I don't play a lot of recreational golf. I still am addicted to competitive golf and [I enjoy] standing over a ball, knowing that you have to execute. My experience is mostly in New England but I have a lot of it. Once I got inside the ropes it felt like, 'I want to hit this shot.'" – **Brian Cain**, of Montpelier, Vt., on his first USGA championship appearance

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