**Three Sides Share Medalist Honors at 13 Under Par**

By David Shefter, USGA

**WHAT HAPPENED**

Thirteen proved to be a lucky number for three sides on Sunday in the 5th U.S. Amateur Four-Ball Championship.

Texans Derek Abel and Christopher Wheeler joined New Jersey residents Troy Vannucci and Vince Kwon, and former Santa Clara University teammates Derek Ackerman and Matthew McCarty as co-medalists after posting 36-hole stroke-play totals of 13-under-par 128.

Abel, 36, of Dallas, and Wheeler, 36, of Addison, matched the championship 18-hole record with a 62 on stroke-play co-host Pacific Dunes after shooting a 5-under 66 on Old Macdonald on Saturday. Vannucci, 27, and Kwon, 25, both of Marlton, posted a second consecutive 64, this time on Pacific Dunes, while Ackerman, 22, of Santa Clara, Calif., and McCarty, 21, of Scottsdale, Ariz., followed up Saturday’s 63 on Old Macdonald with a 65 on Pacific Dunes.

Pacific Dunes and Old Macdonald, two of the 18-hole layouts at Bandon Dunes Golf Resort, were used for the stroke-play portion of the competition. The field of 128 sides will be trimmed to 32 for match play, all on Old Macdonald. The cut for match play came at 6-under 135, with seven sides playing off for the final four spots in the draw Monday morning at 7 a.m. PDT on Old Macdonald.

Conditions changed drastically from Saturday to Sunday, with overcast skies and intermittent rain being replaced by sunshine and stronger breezes. Temperatures also got into the upper 50s from just barely cracking 50 during Round 1.

“It was a lot breezier today,” said Ackerman, who will graduate from Santa Clara in two weeks. “Yesterday, it was about as easy conditions as you can have, other than the rain.”

Abel and Wheeler, former mini-tour players who regained their amateur status in 2016 and 2012, respectively, certainly enjoyed the conditions, registering five birdies over their first six holes, including four in a row from No. 1. None of the converted birdie putts were more than 10 feet. At that point, both players knew they were all but into match play, which eased any tension.

“We really didn’t have a number in mind, but we got to a point where we didn’t have to worry about the cut or anything like that,” said Wheeler. “We were just having fun, basically.”

Abel and Wheeler have known each other for 20-plus years, having grown up together in junior golf and then traveling the mini-tour circuit for four years.

“We kind of know each other’s game really, really well, so … we’ll start to forget it’s a tournament and play like we do on the weekends [back home],” said Abel.

Kwon, a caddie at Philadelphia Cricket Club, site of the 2020 U.S. Amateur Four-Ball, and Merion Golf Club (2022 Curtis Cup and 2026 U.S. Amateur), and Vannucci also got off to a hot start on Sunday with three consecutive birdies. They had a similar streak Saturday, making four birdies in a row from the 14th hole on Old Macdonald. The side added birdies on Nos. 14, 17 and 18, with Vannucci punctuating the day with a 10-footer on the closing hole. Kwon stuffed a 52-degree wedge to 7 feet on the par-4 opening hole and flopped a wedge shot to 3 feet from behind the green on the par-5 third. Vannucci’s wedge approach from 63 yards on the second hole stopped 8 feet from the flagstick.

“We’ve been playing well coming in,” said Vannucci, who didn’t play college golf after graduating from First Assembly Christian School in Memphis, Tenn. He now works for American Athletic Track and Turf in Southampton Township, N.J. “We were just trying to get settled in, calm the nerves and just hit shots. That’s all you’ve got to do. Play golf.”

Ackerman and McCarty, a left-hander, played mistake-free golf for the first 14 holes. After a birdie on No. 5, McCarty kept the momentum going with a clutch 15-foot par putt on the sixth green. They made their lone bogey on the 515-yard, par-4 15th to fall back to 12 under, but McCarty coolly converted a 12-foot birdie putt on the par-5 18th to pull the team into a three-way tie for medalist.

“I knew [Derek] was in with 5, so I just figured I’d hit it to the back of the cup,” said McCarty, a rising senior at Santa Clara. “We were definitely thinking about [being medalist] it a little after [Saturday’s 63]. I don’t think that was our main goal coming out here today.”

By Sunday night, it was official.

**NOTABLE**

The 7-for-4 playoff for the final match-play spots will be conducted on Nos. 5, 6 and 7 on Old Macdonald. The holes will continue in that loop until the playoff is completed. Among the sides in the playoff are 2018 semifinalists **Sam Tidd**, of Meridian, Idaho, and **Carson Barry**, of Eagle, Idaho. Tidd just completed his freshman season at the University of Oklahoma. Barry finished his freshman year at Oregon State.

The youngest and oldest competitors in the field each qualified for match play with their partner. **Aidan Tran**, 15, of Fresno, Calif., a rising high school sophomore who is planning to play at Georgia Tech in 2022, shot 9-under 132 with **Jackson Lake**, of Clovis, Calif. And **John Sajevic**, 63, of Fremont, Neb., advanced with his son, **Andrew**, after the duo also finished at 132. They were the only father-son tandem to qualify from the three in the field.

Long Beach, Calif., residents **Hunter** and **Ryder Epson** were the only brother-brother tandem to advance (132). Brothers-in-law **Tyler Cooke**, of Warwick, R.I., and **Bobby Leopold**, of Coventry, R.I., also qualified (131).

Ex-NFL defensive tackle **Kyle Williams**, of Ruston, La., and partner **Greg Berthelot**, of Baton Rouge, La., qualified for match play at 10-under 131, thanks to an eagle on the 379-yard, par-4 third hole on Old Macdonald. It was the only eagle on a par 4 during stroke play. Berthelot drove the green and made the 15-foot putt. “I hit a little left of the line,” said Berthelot. “Once I hit it, I knew it had a chance, but I didn’t think it was going to get there. I hit the putt to the right and let the wind take it in. It was a great [putt], it got us going.” Williams played 13 seasons with the Buffalo Bills, making six Pro Bowls, before retiring last December.

2016 U.S. Mid-Amateur champion **Stewart Hagestad**, of Newport Beach, Calif., and partner **Derek Busby**, of Ruston, La., carded a 6-under 64 on Pacific Dunes to qualify for match play at 11-under 130.

2017 U.S. Mid-Amateur champion **Matt Parziale**, of Brockton, Mass., and his partner, **Herbie Aikens**, of Kingston, Mass., fired a 65 Sunday on Pacific Dunes to qualify for match play at 7-under 134. Parziale also shared low-amateur honors in last year’s U.S. Open at Shinnecock Hills Golf Club.

**Nathan Smith**, of Pittsburgh, Pa., and **Todd White**, of Spartanburg, S.C., the inaugural U.S. Amateur Four-Ball champions in 2015, failed to qualify for match play after posting a 36-hole total of 1-under 140.

Another USGA champion, **Michael McCoy** (2013 U.S. Mid-Amateur), of Norwalk, Iowa, and partner **Gene Elliott**, of West Des Moines, Iowa, also failed to qualify after shooting 2-under 139.

Supported by the largest gallery of the day, Bandon Dunes caddies **Kevin Rei**, of Bandon, Ore., and **Kyle Crawford**, of Coos Bay, Ore., came up one stroke short of the playoff. In front of at least 50 caddies and other employees, Rei and Crawford needed a birdie on Pacific Dunes’ par-5 closing hole but made par to post 5-under 136.

**QUOTABLE**

“We had prime scoring conditions at Pacific [Dunes] coming out at 7 o’clock in the morning. No wind. You can get after it a little bit. We just played solid golf. Our putters went cold [in the middle of the round], but we were still giving ourselves looks [at birdie]. Fairways and greens and we snuck a few [birdies] coming in down the stretch [on Nos. 14, 17 and 18]. It was fun. – **Troy Vannucci** after shooting a 6-under 64 on Pacific Dunes with partner **Vince Kwon**

“Any time you can play 36 holes and not make a bogey is fantastic.” – **Todd Mitchell** after posting 10-under 131 with partner **Scott Harvey.**

“We were definitely leaking oil and I had to make a decent par putt on 14. The goal was to just get one and get back in the right direction. It totally changed the momentum because we were reeling a little bit.” – **Marc Dull** on making a 10-foot eagle putt on the par-5 15th hole on Old Macdonald en route to a 4-under 67 with partner **Chip Brooke**

“It’s different. It is nothing close to what we have in [New Jersey]. [My partner] hit a tee shot on 17 [on Old Macdonald] that ended up in the fairway. At home it would have been 20 yards OB (out of bounds).” – **Brendan Hansen** on playing Old Macdonald. He and partner **Jack Wall** shot an 8-under 63 in Sunday’s second round to post 10-under 131 in stroke play

“We did a good job of managing the wind. We gave ourselves two looks on every hole.” – **Andrew Medley** after he and his partner, **Taylor Wood**, shot 7-under 64 on Old Macdonald to finish stroke play at 12-under 129

“We both thought, not to say in a cocky way or anything, that if we do our thing, we’re a good team and tough to beat. I have a lot of faith in [Derek] where if I put myself out of it, he’s going to step up to the plate and hit a few good ones. I just think there’s a lot of trust. We played really hard [Saturday on Old Macdonald] and well today, so just looking forward to tomorrow.” – 2016 U.S. Mid-Amateur champion **Stewart Hagestad** after posting 11-under 130 with partner **Derek Busby.**

*David Shefter is a senior staff writer for the USGA. Email him at* [*dshefter@usga.org*](mailto:dshefter@usga.org)*.*