

Hagestad Rolls Into Quarters; Medalist Behr Ousted at 38th U.S. Mid-Amateur

By David Shefter, USGA

WHAT HAPPENED

Stewart Hagestad had a senior moment on Tuesday at Charlotte Country Club.

In fact, that 2016 U.S. Mid-Amateur champion had two of them.

Hagestad, 27, of Newport Beach, Calif., defeated two of the best senior golfers in the country to earn a spot in the quarterfinals of the 38th U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship.

The member of the victorious 2017 USA Walker Cup Team first defeated 2018 U.S. Senior Amateur champion Jeff Wilson, 55, of Fairfield, Calif., 3 and 2, in the Round of 32 and followed that with a 3-and-2 triumph over 2016 U.S. Senior Amateur runner-up Matt Sughrue, 59, of Arlington, Va., the oldest competitor to qualify for match play.

“Yeah, I remember it was either [2015 U.S. Mid-Amateur champion] Sammy Schmitz or someone else,” said Hagestad, “but they said that getting through the first day is good, but to make it through the second day, that is where a lot of cool things can happen with exemptions and just maybe a little bit more attention as far as the event or prestige or whatever.

“I played two really, really strong seniors today and I'm happy to be moving on.”

But the top seed and medalist, Stephen Behr, 25, of Florence, S.C., wasn't so fortunate. Leading by one hole with two to play against Rusty Mosley, 36, of Vidalia, Ga., Behr saw his opponent win holes 17 and 18 with pars for a 1-up victory. The Florida State alumnus closed out the match in dramatic fashion by converting a 25-foot downhill putt after Behr pushed his approach into the right greenside bunker. Behr's third shot went into the bunker on the opposite side of the green and then he nearly holed his fourth shot, setting the stage for Mosley's heroics.

“Biggest putt of my life so far,” said Mosley, who is competing in his first U.S. Mid-Amateur. “Pretty neat.”

Two North Carolinians are among the final eight. Brett Boner, 40, of Charlotte, a member at stroke-play co-host Carolina Golf Club, defeated Kory Bowman, of Springfield, Mo., 4 and 3, to reach the quarterfinals, while University of North Carolina alumnus Kevin O'Connell, 30, of Cary, N.C., defeated Frank Alafoginis, of Arlington, Va., 4 and 3.

East Carolina University graduate Ryan Eibner, 27, of Dallas, Texas, who lived in Cary before moving to the Houston area for high school, never trailed in defeating Matt Mattare, of Jersey City, N.J., 3 and 2. Eibner's older brother, Drew, played on the same Cary high school team (Green Hope) as O'Connell and helped them win a 4A state title in 2003.

“I love North Carolina,” said Eibner. “I call Texas home now, but it's definitely a second home for sure. I know a lot of people here.”

Sam O'Dell, a 40-year-old cosmetic dentist from Hurricane, W.Va., who lost to eventual champion Matt Parziale in the Round of 16 last year, had the most lopsided Round-of-16 victory, playing the equivalent

of 2-under-par golf over 13 holes in eliminating U.S. Naval pilot Benjamin Hayes, 30, of Jacksonville, Fla., 6 and 5.

“It has to be up there,” said O’Dell when asked where this feat ranked in his golf career. “I would have answered it different probably three years ago. At this point, all the state stuff, I mean, I’ve kind of done everything. I finally believe I can compete [on the national level]. West Virginia has some good players, but the quality of the [U.S. Mid-Amateur] field and how difficult the course is ... if every kind of aspect of your game isn’t pretty good, you can’t make it this far.”

Andres Schonbaum, 27, of Argentina, built a 4-up advantage through nine holes and held on for a 2-and-1 victory over Texan Grant Schroeder, of Montgomery.

In the final Round-of-16 match of the day, City of Burbank (Calif.) firefighter Kyler Sauer, 27, of Valencia, Calif., birdied the 17th hole and then two-putted for par from 50 feet on 18 to defeat Derek Busby, of Ruston, La., 1 up. Busby nearly holed a bunker shot for birdie before Sauer converted from 5 feet.

WHAT’S NEXT

The championship continues with quarterfinal and semifinal matches on Wednesday at Charlotte Country Club. The first quarterfinal match is scheduled to begin at 8 a.m. EDT. The 36-hole championship match will be contested on Thursday with the champion receiving an exemption in the 2019 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach (Calif.) Golf Links.

FS1 is broadcasting live from 4-6 p.m. on Wednesday and Thursday.

Admission to the championship is free.

NOTABLE

- All eight quarterfinalists are exempt into the 2019 U.S. Mid-Amateur at Colorado Golf Club in Parker. CommonGround Golf Course will be the stroke-play co-host.
- Seven of the eight remaining players are first-time quarterfinalists in any USGA championship. Only **Stewart Hagestad**, the 2016 champion, has previously advanced to the final eight.
- **Sam O’Dell**, of Hurricane, W.Va., is the lone competitor remaining who was involved in Monday’s 16-for-12 playoff for the final match-play spots. He is the 61st seed.
- **Andres Schonbaum**, of Argentina, is vying to be the first foreign-born champion in U.S. Mid-Amateur history. Canadians **Garrett Rank** (2012) and **Warren Sye** (1995), and South-African born **Wayne Raath** (2000) are the only international players to reach a final.
- This week’s U.S. Mid-Amateur is the first time **Kyler Sauer**, of Valencia, Calif., has competed in a match-play competition. He got emotional when informed being a quarterfinalist earned him an exemption into next year’s championship.
- The 22-hole, Round-of-32 victory by **Brett Boner**, of Charlotte, N.C., over **Claudio Consul**, of Germany, is longest 18-hole match since 2012.

QUOTABLE

Medalist Stephen Behr, of Florence, S.C., on the tough 1-down defeat to Rusty Mosley in the Round of 16:

“Huge positive for me this week. Just qualifying for this event is an honor. I've had this event circled on my calendar for a while. For me to come in here, qualify, medal, and play so well, I mean, I feel like almost medaling puts a target on your back. I feel like I got everyone's best. The three matches I played I got real quality matches. Everyone played really well. You know, I just got beat.”

Kevin O’Connell, of Cary, N.C., on the pressure of playing a national championship in his home state:

“I don't know about more pressure. It's certainly nice to be able to drive here. You know, obviously growing up down here I'm used to the grass, but I've never played Charlotte Country Club. I've played Carolina Golf Club a couple times. So it's a treat to be here at Charlotte Country Club. But as far as added pressure, I don't think I feel that. There is enough pressure at any USGA event.”

Sam O’Dell, of Hurricane, W.Va., on being exempt for next year’s U.S. Mid-Amateur by reaching the quarterfinals:

“That's sweet. I've never been exempt, so it's another step. It's special. I think it's great.”

Stewart Hagestad, of Newport Beach, Calif., on beating reigning U.S. Senior Amateur champion Jeff Wilson in the Round of 32:

“Jeff is really good. I wouldn't say I was intimidated by him, but at the same time, if you look at his résumé and what's he's done, not like over the last year, but over the last 30 years, Jeff is a total stud. I knew that we couldn't fake it today and we were going to have to go out and play well.”

Ryan Eibner, of Dallas, Texas, on earning an exemption into the 2019 U.S. Mid-Amateur:

“That's pretty badass. I did not know that. No, that's awesome. I'm super pumped. Keep playing well, and hopefully I can be exempt into some other things when I win.”

Brett Boner, of Charlotte, N.C., on winning his afternoon match after going 22 holes in the morning:

“I took a shower, changed clothes, put on a new pair of socks and a couple Band-Aids. And, yeah, once I got off the first tee and hit a solid tee shot, I'm like, ‘Just stick to your routine.’ My whole thing this week has been routine, commit and, accept.”

Benjamin Hayes, of Jacksonville, Fla., on the feeling of playing an away game against Charlotte resident Stephen Woodard in the Round of 32:

“Oh, 100%. I think we probably had the biggest gallery out her for sure. I would make a par, he'd make a par, and they would clap for him. That's the fun part about this. They're rooting for the hometown guy, which puts a bull's eye on him and not on me. I can just go out there and have fun and enjoy the moment.”

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