**Simson Keeps Perfect Round-of-64 Mark Intact at The Kittansett Club**

By David Shefter, USGA

**What Happened**

Few things in life are guaranteed. The sun rising in the east and setting in the west. Christmas falling on Dec. 25 and April 15 as the federal tax filing deadline. Add Paul Simson winning a first-round match in the U.S. Senior Amateur Championship to that list.

Simson, 71, of Raleigh, N.C., a two-time champion (2010 and 2012), continued one of the more remarkable streaks in USGA history on a sunny, breezy Monday at The Kittansett Club in Marion, Mass., when he defeated Buddy Allen, of Pevely, Mo., 2 up, in the Round of 64. Since first becoming eligible for this championship in 2006, Simson has never lost an Round-of-64 match, a perfect 14-for-14. He did not play in 2014 and he missed the cut last year at the Country Club of Detroit.

His overall match-play record now stands at 35-11, just three victories shy of the all-time mark held by Lewis Oehmig, who won the last of his three titles in 1985 at age 69. In a format that can be extremely fickle, even for the most talented of golfers, the run of opening victories is amazing.

Certainly, there have been some close calls over this 16-year span, including a 19-hole win over Mitch Wilson in 2016 when Simson was 2 down with two to play. Monday’s victory marked the fourth time he has been extended to the 18th hole.

On Monday, Simson, the owner of a whopping 44 Carolinas Golf Association titles and nine Putter Boy Trophies as a champion in various North & South age brackets at Pinehurst Resort, played some uncharacteristic golf on the outward nine. A pair of double bogeys and a bogey in a three-hole stretch put him 1 down. But in typical Simson fashion, he played the final 10 holes in the equivalent of 1 under par (with concessions), including a 42-foot birdie putt on the par-5 18th to close it out.

“That’s OK, isn’t it?” said Simson, laughing at his achievement. “I seem to focus pretty well in match play and am able to dig down deep and that’s what you have to do. You just fight every hole. I had three holes out there today – 5, 6 and 7 – where I lost my mind and I said, what is going on? But we settled down and I think I played a couple under [par] after that.”

Simson next faces Massachusetts amateur legend Frank Vana, 60, of Boxford, who ousted 2012 runner-up Curtis Skinner, of Lake Bluff, Ill., 4 and 3. Skinner’s defeat in the final at Mountain Ridge Golf Club in West Caldwell, N.J., that September was to Simson, a native of Chatham, N.J., who relocated to North Carolina after his collegiate days at the University of New Mexico. Vana is a nine-time Massachusetts Golf Association Player of the Year.

Simson and Vana met in the 2017 semifinals, with Simson prevailing before he lost to Sean Knapp at The Minikahda Club in Minneapolis, Minn.

Knapp, 60, of Oakmont, Pa., the No. 4 seed in the bracket, overcame an early 2-hole deficit to eliminate John Wright, of Fairhope, Ala., 2 and 1.

[Defending champion Gene Elliott, 60, of West Des Moines, Iowa, who has battled health issues most of the summer](https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/championships/2022/u-s--senior-amateur/articles/notebook--former-nfl-qb-humphries-makes-usga-debut.html#returnable), drained a 7-foot par putt on No. 18 to close out Tom Winegardner, of Lothian, Md., 1 up. Elliott withdrew from the U.S. Amateur two weeks ago.

“I had missed a 5-footer up the hill on 17 to win the match,” said Elliott. “That putt [on 18] was a left-to-right putt and the wind was blowing left to right. I just wanted to give it a chance to go in. It’s a miracle that I’m here. It’s a miracle that I’m playing. And to have won a match is … literally a miracle. All the issues that I have with my health, I didn’t think I’d be here.”

Three other U.S. Senior Amateur champions also advanced to the final 32, including co-medalist and No. 2 seed Jeff Wilson, 59, of Fairfield, Calif. The 2018 titlist defeated ex-NFL quarterback and playoff survivor Stan Humphries, of Monroe, La. Wilson tied the first nine holes of the match before winning Nos. 10, 11 and 12 en route to a 3-and-2 triumph.

Also moving on was 2019 champ and No. 4 seed Bob Royak, 60, of Alpharetta, Ga., who built a 6-up lead at the turn and cruised a 6-and-5 win over Michael Zoerhoff, of Caledonia, Mich. Meanwhile, 2013 champion Doug Hanzel, 65, of Savannah, Ga., rallied from a 4-down deficit with eight to play to beat Rupert Kellock, of England, 1 up.

But Chip Lutz, of Reading, Pa., the 2015 champion, wasn’t so fortunate. A winning par on the 18th hole pushed Peter Detemple, of Canada, past Lutz, who like Elliott and Simson, has won the U.S., Canadian and British senior titles.

Co-medalist Miles McConnell, 56, of Tampa, Fla., miraculously avoided being the second No. 1 seed in as many years to fall in the opening round. Two down with two to go against 2021 runner-up and No. 64 seed Jerry Gunthorpe, of Ovid, Mich., the 2021 Florida State Golf Association’s Senior Player of the Year took advantage of his opponent’s poor shots to win Nos. 17 and 18, the former with a conceded birdie. Then on the par-4 19th hole, Gunthorpe’s chip went 12 feet past the flagstick, and he failed to convert his par putt. McConnell, a quarterfinalist in the 1987 U.S. Amateur, made his 4-footer to advance.

“I really just feel like I stole one there,” said McConnell. “The match was pretty much over. He gave me 17, he hit a bad shot and hit another bad shot on 18. I’m just very fortunate to win.”

Last year, medalist Tim Hogarth was upended in 21 holes.

In the longest match of the day, former PGA Tour player Lee Porter, 56, of Greensboro, N.C., who was reinstated in May after taking an 18-year break from competitive golf, edged 2021 semifinalist Craig Davis, of Chula Vista, Calif., in 23 holes. Porter overcame a 3-down deficit at the turn by winning Nos. 10, 13 and 14 before ending the match on the par-4 23rd with a par. During his professional days, Porter, the 1989 North & South Amateur champion, qualified for a pair of U.S. Opens and finished eighth on the PGA Tour money list in 1997.

That wasn’t the only marathon tussle. Mike McCoy, 59, of Des Moines, Iowa, hit his 131-yard approach to 4 feet for a birdie on the 22nd hole to defeat former big-league pitcher Erik Hanson, of Kirkland, Wash. Hanson, who played for four teams during an 11-year career, missed a 6-footer for par on No. 18 that would have eliminated the 2013 U.S. Mid-Amateur champion and 2023 USA Walker Cup captain.

McCoy will face Wilson on Tuesday morning at 8:36 in a matchup of USGA champions.

**What’s Next**

Match play continues on Tuesday with the Rounds of 32 and 16. The first match is scheduled for 7 a.m. EDT, with the Round of 16 set to start at 1 p.m. The quarterfinals and semifinals will be contested on Wednesday, with the 18-hole final on Thursday morning at 8:30 a.m. Spectators are welcome to attend and admission is free.

**Notable**

The 14-for-5 playoff on Monday for the final spots in the draw lasted three holes and took 2 hours, 10 minutes to complete. The survivors included 2021 runner-up **Jerry Gunthorpe** and ex-NFL quarterback **Stan Humphries.**

Two players heavily involved with USGA Allied Golf Associations squared off in the opening round with longtime Iowa Golf Association volunteer **Jon Brown** defeating current Golf Association of Philadelphia president **Oscar Mestre,** in 19 holes. The two only tied four holes out of 19, with Brown, who turned 55 last Friday to become age-eligible, advancing with a par on the first extra hole. It’s been a big year for Mestre as GAP, the oldest state/regional golf association in the country, is celebrating its 125-year anniversary.

What a day it was for the Hawkeye State as all four Iowans – **Brown, Mike McCoy, Gene Elliott and Joe Palmer –** who qualified for match play advanced. Palmer defeated **Danny Nelson**, 3 and 2.

Canadian **Rob Cowan**, the son of two-time U.S. Amateur champion **Gary Cowan**, saw his run ended by 2019 runner-up **Roger Newsom**. Newsom’s winning par on No. 18 gave him a 1-up victory.

An under-the-radar Round-of-32 match on Tuesday will be the 8 a.m. EDT encounter between 2016 U.S. Senior Amateur runner-up **Matthew Sughrue**, of Arlington, Va.,and 2021 U.S. Senior Open low amateur **William Mitchell**, of Atlanta, Ga., who advanced to the quarterfinals last year.

**Quotable**

“I was real disappointed last year. This year I admittedly hadn’t been playing as well as I have [in past years]. But the last six weeks it’s been pretty good, and I’ve started to play a lot better. Just one of those things you just have to keep after it and find it. Then hopefully keep ahold of it once you find it.” – **Paul Simson**,after having failed to make match play for the first time in his U.S. Senior Amateur career in 2021

“What a great, great venue. It’s English golf, it’s American golf, it’s Scottish golf. It’s like about seven venues in one. It’s just a great place to play.” – **Simson** on The Kittansett Club

“It’s probably the best I’ve felt over the three days, which isn’t saying much because I felt awful the first two days. But to make match play, it was unbelievable. I don’t know how I did it. My back is a little bit better. The shoulder’s killing me. To be this far, I would have never guessed it.” – **Gene Elliott**

“It’s great. I have a lot of friends reaching out. I’m getting a lot of phone support and email support, which is cool. Some friends are coming out to watch as well as people I haven’t seen for a long time, so that’s been great.” – **Frank Vana** on playing in his home state

“It was blowing really hard and there was no bad par. That's the way I played. I think the only real mistake I made was 13. I just kept making pars, and a lot of them were tough pars. I think I was 2 over for the day (with concessions), which wasn't that bad. It was just hard out there." – co-medalist and No. 2 seed **Jeff Wilson** on the conditions

“The wind’s been kind of different every day. It’s what Kittansett should be. Keep you on your toes, right? As long as the sun’s shining and everyone’s smiling, that’s good.” – **Vana** on the conditions

“I’ve been coaching girls high school basketball for about 18 years, and I’m to the point now where they say, ‘You did what?’ They have no clue. Out here, I’ll introduce myself to someone and they’ll say, ‘Stan Humphries… Did you play quarterback?’ And they’ll say, Oh wow!’ I don’t know if it’s because of the way I look now because I’m retired and overweight.” – **Stan Humphries**, 10-year NFL quarterback, who made match play in his USGA championship debut

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