**Past Champ Wilson, McConnell Medalists at The Kittansett Club**

By David Shefter, USGA

**What Happened**

Jeff Wilson seems to be amateur golf’s version of Michael Phelps or Carl Lewis in that he likes to collect medals. The Northern Californian added to his vast collection on Sunday at The Kittansett Club in Marion, Mass, shooting a second-consecutive 1-under-par 70 to share medalist honors in the 67th U.S. Senior Amateur Championship.

Wilson, 59, of Fairfield, posted a 36-hole total of 2-under 140, which was matched by first-round leader Miles McConnell, 56, of Tampa, Fla. The co-medalist honor gives Wilson seven of them in his USGA career, along with low-amateur medals in both the U.S. Open and U.S. Senior Open.

Sean Knapp, the 2017 champion from Oakmont, Pa., finished one stroke back at 141. They were the only three competitors to finish in the red during stroke play.

Bob Royak, of Alpharetta, Ga., the 2019 champion, bogeyed his final hole to finish at even-par 142, along with two of the field’s youngest players who just recently turned 55: Jon Brown, of Adel, Iowa; and Canadian-born Daniel Neveu, of Pinehurst, N.C. Brown became age-eligible one day before the championship, on Friday.

Despite battling various health issues, defending champion Gene Elliott, of West Des Moines, Iowa, advanced to match play at 10-over 152.

The cut for match play came at 11-over 153 with a 14-for-5 playoff set for Monday morning to decide the final spots in the draw.

In 2018, Wilson became the first player in USGA history to earn medalist honors in the U.S. Amateur, U.S. Mid-Amateur and U.S. Senior Amateur – he now has two each in the Amateur and Senior Am and three in the Mid-Am. Of course, he’d like to finish off this year’s championship the same way he did four years ago at Eugene (Ore.) Country Club when he captured his lone USGA title. Coincidentally, he shared medalist honors that year with Gregory Condon.

Wilson, who owns a Toyota dealership, knows the difficult challenge of winning any USGA championship. Only twice in the last 37 years has the medalist/co-medalist won the U.S. Senior Amateur: Wilson and John Richardson in 1987 at Saucon Valley Country Club. Last year’s top seed, Tim Hogarth, lost in the opening round in extra holes.

Playing in breezy conditions alongside Buzzards Bay, Wilson registered five birdies against two bogeys and one double bogey.

“Yesterday, I played a really good round; today I was a little sloppy,” said Wilson, who is joined by Marvin “Vinny” Giles as the only players to earn low-amateur honors in a U.S. Open and U.S. Senior Open. “I made some bad swings today. But anytime you shoot under par out here, it’s a good score.”

The Canadian-born McConnell, who moved to Florida in grammar school and later attended the University of South Florida, appeared poised to take solo medalist honors before making a triple-bogey 7 on the fourth hole. He followed with a bogey on the fifth, but rebounded with his fourth birdie of the round at the par-5 seventh to close with a 1-over 72.

"The wheels kind of came off there for a couple of holes,” said McConnell. “I hit a rescue club off the fourth tee and caught the fairway bunker with a really awkward stance. I completely shanked the wedge shot I was trying to play and it went into the hazard – it went from bad to worse pretty fast. But I bounced back with some solid swings and a birdie on the last four holes.”

Now he’ll look ahead to match play, where he fell in the Round of 64 in his U.S. Senior Amateur debut last year. McConnell, the 2021 Florida State Golf Association’s Senior Player of the Year, advanced to the quarterfinals of the 1987 U.S. Amateur, losing to eventual champion Billy Mayfair at Jupiter Hills Golf Club.

Two-time champion Paul Simson, 70, of Raleigh, N.C., made match play for the 14th time in 15 starts. He’s a perfect 13-for-13 in opening-round matches in the championship with an overall record of 34-11, which is four shy of the all-time wins mark owned by Lewis Oehmig.

Past champions Doug Hanzel (2013) and Chip Lutz (2015) advanced to match play along with USGA champions Mike McCoy (2013 U.S. Mid-Amateur), Jack Larkin Sr. (1979 U.S. Junior Amateur), Randal Lewis (2011 U.S. Mid-Amateur) and Kenneth Bakst (1997 U.S. Mid-Amateur).

**What’s Next**

Prior to the Round of 64 commencing at 8 a.m. EDT on Monday, the 14-man playoff to determine the final five spots in the draw will take place at 7:15 a.m., beginning on Hole 16 and continuing to Nos. 17 and 18 as required. If necessary, the 18th hole will be repeated until the spots are filled. Spectators are welcome to attend, and admission is free.

**Notable**

A couple of notables in the playoff are former NFL quarterback **Stan Humphries**, 2021 runner-up **Jerry Gunthorpe** and **Randy Haag,** who is competing in his 36th USGA championship. **Michael Boden**, of Sandwich, Mass., one of the local favorites, birdied two of his last three holes to make the playoff.

Massachusetts Golf Hall of Fame inductee **Frank Vana**, of Boxford, fired a 75 on Sunday to advance with a 36-hole total of 151. Vana has been the state’s player of the year nine times.

**Erik Hanson**, who pitched for four big-league teams during an 11-year career, qualified for match play with a 36-hole total of 7-over 149 (76-73).

Notable competitors who failed to qualify for match play included USGA champions **Fred Ridley** (1975 U.S. Amateur), **Nathaniel Crosby** (1981 U.S. Amateur), **Stewart “Buddy” Alexander** (1986 U.S. Amateur), **Patrick Tallent** (2014 U.S. Senior Amateur) and **Dave Ryan** (2016 U.S. Senior Amateur). Ridley, a former USGA president and current chairman of Augusta National Golf Club and The Masters Tournament, and Crosby are also past USA Walker Cup captains.

**Neal Barfield** and **John Derrick,** former junior golf rivals and teammates at both Richfield High in Waco, Texas, and Baylor University, each qualified for match play. Barfield, a Dallas resident, shot 7-over 149, while Derrick, who still resides in Waco, came in at 8-over 150.

**Quotable**

“You’d want to play out here every day if it was like this (with little wind). But yesterday was hard. It’s a hard golf course when it’s like that…It’s a great place to have a USGA championship, especially this one. I’ll take [2-under] 140, no matter what the conditions are.” – co-medalist **Jeff Wilson**

“I’ve had a rough season, foot surgery in the fall and I’ve just had a lot of little injuries. But the last few weeks I’ve come into form. I won my 13th Des Moines City Championship… That was exciting to beat the kids. Coming in on a little bit of a good string.” – **Jon Brown** (even-par 142), who became age-eligible a day before the championship started

“It’ll be interesting, I don’t know that it favors any one kind of player to be honest. Just depends on how the wind blows and who gets it in the hole best. My game’s in good shape.” – 2019 champion **Bob Royak** on match play

“It’s a great honor to be medalist. I didn’t even realize you got a medal for that. Ultimately it’s sort of the halfway point and the real tournament starts tomorrow, but it’s a nice thing to have and to remember.” – **Miles McConnell**

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