

U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship

Friday, September 15, 2023
Scarborough, New York, USA
Sleepy Hollow Country Club

Stewart Hagestad

Press Conference



guys have a group that helps them get to their best, and credit needs to be given to the entire team for all the accomplishments that take place. But ultimately it's your decision. You pull the trigger. It's on you.

I think there's just so many things that go into the Walker Cup aside from the golf, and speaking for me, I've seen a lot of it, so I'm a little bit desensitized to it, but I did my best certainly this year and in years past to try and eliminate some of the noise for the younger guys.

As far as this week is concerned, I really tried to -- okay, that was great, what an amazing experience, that was last week, let's focus on this week. I genuinely love the MGA. I think besides the USGA they run the best set of events in the country, with no disrespect to the SCGA. I'll probably get in trouble if that's put in print. I'm not just saying that.

You're here, and I've said this to Brian Mahoney, and they run a great set, but the golf courses in this region, the golf IQ, the players that come out of this area, let alone the whole country, to have it take place here means a lot to me.

Q. Besides winning this title, there are exemptions that come with it. What's it going to mean to --

STEWART HAGESTAD: Hopefully invitations.

Q. -- go back to the U.S. Open at Pinehurst and also likely go back to the Masters?

STEWART HAGESTAD: Yeah, that hasn't really hit me yet. When I got the invitation for the 2022 Masters, I got it and immediately broke down in tears. For the U.S. Open at Pinehurst, the fact that that's where the first USGA event that I played -- like I've played two Amateurs there.

If you had told me in 2008 that I'd be playing the U.S. Open, I would have laughed in your face. I need to basically go and decompress and think about that, but I'm going to enjoy this one while I can.

Q. Let's talk about this match. You're 5-up to start the day. What's your mentality as you get ready to tee off?

STEWART HAGESTAD: I knew I would be nervous. That's normal. I was nervous yesterday afternoon, last

Q. Stewart Hagestad, 2023 U.S. Mid-Amateur champion. It's the third one. You're a student of history; what's it mean to you?

STEWART HAGESTAD: Yeah, I've been like teetering on crying since we got done. I'm speechless. I don't know what to say.

Q. When you think about the names and you know them, Nathan Smith, Jay Sigel, and then all the others who have won at least three USGA championships, including some guy named Tiger Woods, what's it mean to have your name in their company?

STEWART HAGESTAD: I mean, what do you say to that? It's anything beyond what I would have ever dreamed of, right. When you're a kid, you dream of playing in USGA events. I still remember my first one in 2008, and just the lights were so bright and the course was so long and the course was so hard, and to sit here and to look back and say that I've won three USGA championships, I mean, that's unbelievable.

There's so many amazing players, and to even be able to compete in one, let alone to go the distance and win, it's a week that I'll remember for the rest of my life.

Q. In some ways does this one mean more because you just came off a winning Walker Cup for the fourth time?

STEWART HAGESTAD: You know, I can see how you would maybe think that. I compartmentalize them differently, just to me.

If you're fortunate enough to be picked for a Walker Cup team, you're picked to be on a team. Whether that means you play once or you play four times, like bring it.

This one is different to me because golf inherently is an individual sport. You certainly have a team around you and there's -- if you look at the PGA TOUR, most of the



night. I actually slept pretty well last night.

But my first thought this morning was, hey, let's go get it, instead of let's steer the ship in or let's do our best and hope he gives you a couple holes. My first thought was, hey, you're playing well; let's go win this thing.

I think just because it was derived from a sense of maybe confidence to try and go get it done versus a place of what happens if you don't, like I tried to keep reminding myself, if you don't win today, your life will not change that much.

I know that's like maybe depending on your philosophy as a sports psychologist, that's maybe not what you would think, but my thought was, hey, be willing to miss, be willing to hit poor shots; let's do the same thing we did the whole week. Let's go be aggressive; let's take conservative targets and make aggressive swings. Like let's go win this thing.

Q. You were aggressive at the start, especially I thought on the tee shot on 3. You went right after it.

STEWART HAGESTAD: Yeah, I missed that. I thought right and I missed it in the right place. I thought right. I was aimed like 15, 20 feet left and I pushed it just a fraction. But that's a byproduct of when you're playing well, you're thinking right, and when you do those two things and you miss it and you miss it in the right place, a lot of times it can end up being a really good shot.

Q. Moving to what was the back nine this morning, he made a little bit of a run at you --

STEWART HAGESTAD: Which we knew would come. Look, Evan is really good. The two of us collectively are two of the best mids in the game according to the rankings or whatever. I don't know how to put that in print without making me look arrogant.

But the point being is he's really good, and I'm very well aware of some of the things he's won in the state of Virginia, in the mid-Atlantic. I've seen his game in person at the Coleman for a couple years. He's going to be playing these things for a long time.

He's an example of one of those guys that after he got his amateur status back, it probably was almost a sense of relief of how much he loves to play and compete.

He's really good, and I knew that he was going to make some birdies, and it was going to be more stressful than maybe the internet would have thought. But the reality is when you play really good players and they have nothing to lose -- you saw it with Costanza; you saw it with me in

2016. I'm not surprised that he made a good run, and luckily I was able to fend him off.

Q. Talk about the up-and-down from the bunker on 13 because obviously that was a key moment.

STEWART HAGESTAD: Yeah, that was cool. I hit a good tee shot, and then actually hit a really nice wedge, too. I'm sure it got up there awfully close, probably three or four feet, and then spun back, which is kind of a bummer.

But I smiled when I saw it spin off the green. Like obviously you're annoyed and you're bummed. You have plenty of room long to miss there. But at the same time, you hit good shots -- I played great this whole week, and I didn't have -- I wouldn't say I didn't have a ton go wrong, but just executed at a high level, and you're going to have a couple things that don't go maybe as planned even if you think you hit a nice shot.

So when it spun back, I was bummed. I obviously saw that he was like 20, 25 feet, and my only thought was, hey, when I got up to the green and looked at it, like this isn't impossible; we can hit this out to eight, ten feet; let's give ourselves a look, and let's just give ourselves a good chance.

I was thinking back to a practice session me and some friends had earlier this summer, and I just -- we hit a bunch of really -- one of our buddies has got a sick short game and we were working on a couple things, and that's some of the stuff that I just kept harkening back to was just some of the shots we were hitting.

Q. Then we get to the 16th green. What is that feeling like when you know you've won?

STEWART HAGESTAD: I was convinced in my head that he was going to make that. Time slows down, good players make putts, hit good shots. You saw it on the tee shot. You saw it on 15, as well. When it missed, it almost takes a second for you to kind of like realize what's happened.

There's almost this sense of like oh, my gosh, you just won.

You kind of shake hands with everyone and you give him a hug and then you decompress for another 30 seconds. Like I shook hands with Willie the first time, and I wasn't really thinking, like I just -- that's when I was kind of like, oh, shoot, I've got to give my -- you're just ready to go to the next hole.

So I was like, oh, my gosh, okay, hang on, let me shake

everyone's hand and then let's go in there for a big one.

Q. In '21 when you won, there was a similar situation where you had to play the 18 holes one day and 18 holes the next day. Did that experience help you at all in this situation?

STEWART HAGESTAD: You know, I think if it's a yes-or-no question, the answer is yes. But I think, again, just more with like a little bit of experience and kind of that understanding that hey, let's go play our best, let's go win this thing, but if you don't, it's going to be okay.

I think that freed me up a little bit more versus having drawn on that experience because then everything started getting really fast, but at the same time, Costanza is really good. He's the Met Player of the Year, two-time Met Player of the Year. He's won a ton of big events. He's got a ton of horsepower, and Evan was the same way.

We knew there was going to be stretches where we were either uncomfortable or stressed out or they were going to make a run, and we just kind of had to keep chipping away, keep pushing, and that's what we did.

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