**2021 U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship**

**Sunday, Sept. 26, Second Round, Sankaty Head Golf Club and Miacomet Golf Course**

**Yaroslav Merkulov, Rochester, N.Y. –**

**(65, 5-under, ties Sankaty course record; 66-65--131)**

I was a little frustrated with the way I finished yesterday and had a nice discussion with my coach last night and that helped me regroup. Today was just… when it’s windy like this, I didn’t hit a single stock shot the entire day. Every shot felt manufactured and in a weird way, that goes into my comfort zone, because I love going out there and hitting shots. It set up well for me. We really had a lot of fun out there… to be playing in a national championship during our vacation, we’re just enjoying that.

[re. the conditions, with winds gusting over 20 mph]: The big thing was just staying committed to what you were trying to hit, whether you were trying to ride the wind or fight the wind, whatever it was, you have to commit to the shot and that alone will mitigate the wide misses. If you sway from that in this wind, good luck. You’ve got to stay committed to it.

He [caddie Kyle Rothfuss] and I talked a lot about stepping into the shot and watching myself hit the shot. And from there, I don’t deviate from it. Mainly just trying to make swings… once I’m set up to the ball, I don’t need to worry about anything.

I didn’t make very many mistakes, and when I did, I was making birdies. On 11, I made a birdie out of the fescue. On 16, I made a birdie out of the fescue… Another big thing is that I putted really well from inside 10 feet. I don’t know what my stats were, but I hit a lot of putts inside of 10 feet that I played outside the hole, and I don’t remember missing one. You’ve got to play for the wind on the greens; that’s another interesting thing. You could have a downhill putt that’s into the wind that will play slower than the uphill putt coming back. You’ve definitely got to pay attention.

[on the luck of the draw]: This is a total 180 from Oakmont a month ago in the U.S. Amateur, as far as the draw goes. I feel like got the better part of the draw this time. I was in the afternoon wave at Oakmont on the first day, and you know, my wave had only like 6 guys make match play [weather delays meant that some of those players in the p.m. draw had to play up to 30 holes in one day].

On possibly being medalist: It’s a feather in the cap, for sure. I really do want to win the stroke-play medalist. This is my eighth USGA championship, there’s always a little pride over winning that, but then you’ve got to reset and go into match play. My motto this week has been to think and act like a champion… and then everything else takes care of itself. (Mindset is to) focus on things that are within your control… remember what you can control and know what you can’t.

I would say, this was not a pretty 9 under, I did not hit a lot of shots that look appealing… a lot of low hooks, low cuts, if it was downwind, I tried to sky it in the air. As I said, not a single shot I hit today was ‘stock’… That’s what happens when you play in the wind.

Having played the course with different wind directions, I can see it playing both ways and being very challenging for match play. I’m excited. I’m not accustomed to coasting into match play; I’ve always been right on the cut line, either make it by one or two or miss it by one or two. It’s kinda nice.

NOTE - Was in caddie Kyle Rothfuss’ wedding three weeks ago in Rochester, N.Y.