

U.S. MID-AMATEUR CHAMPIONSHIP

September 15, 2016

Stewart Hagestad

Q. Stewart, you are the 2016 U.S. Mid-Amateur champion, how does it feel?

STEWART HAGESTAD: It's an absolute dream come true. This is something I've dreamed about ever since I can remember, and it's an honor and a privilege to represent Mid-amateurs around the country and to have won the championship.

Q. Tell us about how you come back from being that far down?

STEWART HAGESTAD: Just keep chipping away at it. I didn't want to go to sleep tonight knowing I left anything out there, or I wanted to leave everything I had out there. Just one hole at a time, one shot at a time. And I was hitting it pretty darn well I felt like for the last couple days, and if I could just see a couple putts go in the hole, I felt like I could get the ball rolling.

On 17, Scott obviously forced my hand, and I could give that one a little more authority. But I'm just happy to have -- I'm proud of the way I grinded back, and I'm proud of the way that I competed. And, like I said, it wasn't exactly where I would put myself to start the day, but I'm proud of the way that I competed.

Q. Was there one shot that really just kind of kicked it?

STEWART HAGESTAD: I'll remember the putt on 17 for a really long time.

Q. But before that, was there something that really just kick started the comeback? One shot or one putt that you just went, okay, I got it.

STEWART HAGESTAD: As far as an iron shot goes, I would say probably the shot 13, even though I missed the putt, I really committed to a good yardage and to a solid target and I pulled the trigger. I, unfortunately, didn't make the putt. But when the putt on 14 went in, that was big.

When I hit a great -- one of the best iron shots -- 15 is such a hard hole. Like, and this is nothing against the USGA or the course, like borderline half the field doesn't know how to put it on the green. I made the joke walking off that tee box, that might be the only two balls in a group.

It's a tricky yardage. The wind is swirling. It's a pitched green. It's a very fair hole; it's just super hard. So when I hit a great iron shot there and then when I made the putt, then I kind of started believing in myself and started to kind of see the lines and match the lines with the speed. I just wanted a little bit of breathing room. But definitely the putts, 14 was big, 15 was much bigger.

Q. You mentioned on the 9th green that you were still in shock. Are you still in shock maybe that this really happened?

STEWART HAGESTAD: On 9 I was fully in shock. I think I'm still in shock, but it's beginning to hit me. I mentioned it yesterday when I was talking to Holly. I know myself and I know my emotions and I don't want this to come off as, I don't know, feminine, I guess, real men cry. I don't know. Shoot, I know I'm going to cry later. This is a dream come true for me, and when it does hit me, this is something I've worked for my entire life and the shock will go away. But there will be -- I just can't wait to hug my mom and dad. Yeah, I'll just say that.

Q. How does it feel to know you're going to go play Augusta National?

STEWART HAGESTAD: It hasn't kicked in yet. It hasn't kicked in yet. I probably shouldn't say this. I've been lucky enough to have played there before. My senior year of college, Pat Haden who was our athletic director who, shoot, I love Pat. The L.A. Times doesn't, but I sure do. He's a good family friend and he's a great guy.

I was lucky enough to go down there my senior year and -- actually, it's a funny story. I'll tell this one. This

is good. So my senior year, he takes the team down. He takes a coach, an assistant coach and a guy in our compliance department because you've got to keep those guys happy. So we go down and we're going to -- we flew in Friday early, so we got to Augusta at like 4:00 or 5:00. Had a nice dinner. We were supposed to play 36 the next day. 18 on Sunday and fly home. So on Saturday I have a chance to play with my college freshman roommate, Sam Smith who is going to be my four-ball partner, and a name I'm sure a lot of people are beginning to become familiar with, Jeff Knox. And we also played with our assistant coach, John Wurzer. So we play and it was fun.

You know, when you have the opportunity to go there, it's like heaven. It's like everything is whole. You don't want to touch anything. I was afraid to walk even on the putting green.

So we go, and the first round we play it was across the way, so we ended up playing 27. So the first round with Jeff, and Sam and John, and we're just looking at everything. That's where Bubba hit this shot. That's where Phil hit the shot on 13. That's where Tiger made the putt on -- shoot, second thought where hasn't Tiger made a putt on the golf course? You know, the chip on 16.

So, yeah, it was a really neat experience, but I was a total deer in the headlights that first round. So we have lunch, we get down and the coaches go, okay -- I know I'm making this story long, but it's a good one and there is a point to this.

So the coaches say we've played 18. We have time for nine more, and then maybe the par-3 contest. What nine do you guys want to play? Well, obviously we're going to play the back nine. That's where the expression back nine on Sunday at Augusta, there is no better afternoon in sports.

So we go and I played pretty well. I shot 4-under playing with my athletic director, another kid on the team and another member. And I'm walking off the 18th green going to play the par-3 contest. My athletic director -- I was of age at the time of legal purposes. He's like -- I hope this isn't against compliance, but we're just going to go with it -- can I buy you a beer? So I just played Augusta National, shot 4-under on the back nine, playing with my athletic director my senior year of college and we're going to play the par-3 contest.

My thought at that time, is this is the peak, all downhill from here. Literally, you have no responsibility. This is the greatest day of your life. And the opportunity to go back and compete in The Masters, I think outdoes that. More importantly to be with friends and old friends, guys who were out on TOUR and with my family, it's something I've literally dreamed about since the time I started playing golf.

That golf tournament is so special. Again, it's an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to go down there again.

Q. Who are some people you know that are playing professional golf?

STEWART HAGESTAD: Jordan Spieth and Justin Thomas are my two closest friends out there. We had dinner two weeks.

Q. That will be a practice round?

STEWART HAGESTAD: That will be a practice round. That's probably one of the first phone calls I'm going to make besides my friends and family. Yeah, absolutely.

But I'm in shock now. I'll be in shock when I get down there. Well, again, to get the opportunity there, it's just special. I can't even think about it right now. I'm over the moon and so overwhelmed with every emotion you can imagine.

Q. Before today, what was the biggest tournament you played?

STEWART HAGESTAD: Probably the Mid-Am earlier this summer. I played pretty well in stroke play and I was a medalist. But to close the door and get it done in the match play meant much, much more to me.

Q. 38 holes too, I believe?

STEWART HAGESTAD: 38 holes, yeah. Ethan Ng's going to be a pretty darn player as soon as he gets to college. Shoot, he already is a good player. He's just going to keep getting better and better as he gets older. Pound-for-pound, that's probably the biggest tournament.

Q. What was that again?

STEWART HAGESTAD: It was at the Country Club of Fairfield up in Connecticut.

Q. So live in New York?

STEWART HAGESTAD: I do. I've been in New York just over two years.

Q. Stewart they're telling us that this is the biggest comeback maybe the biggest comeback since this tournament went from 18 to 36 holes in 2001. What is your reaction to that? Did it feel like it out there?

STEWART HAGESTAD: I had him right where I wanted him (laughing).

No, to be 5-down through 25, don't call it comeback. That's a very, very special statistic. But as I've said before, Scott is kind of, you know, among others, but at least in recent memory, one of if not the shining standard in Mid-Amateur golf. I knew it was going to be a battle all day. And to get away with a victory, Sam, I'm happy that I don't have to go out there and put myself in that position again because as far as closers out there, he's one of, if not the best.

Q. It almost seemed like you were as happy as you were for yourself, you felt a little for him?

STEWART HAGESTAD: Absolutely. Oh, I have so much respect for Scott, and we can throw all that out the door. I had the chance to meet him in L.A. earlier this year. Look, I've thrown away golf tournaments coming down the stretch in little junior club championships and other events. It's a little different than a USGA event.

So, no, his wife was here, his son was here, his family was here. And to be up like that and it's so hard to close out a golf tournament. I'm proud of the way I competed and I was actually a buzz saw there at the end. But at the end of the day one thing I've always really cherished, especially with people in the game of golf, you can ask anyone of my friends that I've been lucky enough to get to know through the years, but Scott is such a great guy and he is such a great competitor. And he's a friend more than anything else.

So, no, I absolutely feel for him and, yeah, it's a bummer. But he'll be back. He's, as I said before, one of, if not the shining standard in amateur golf. I can't wait to see him in a couple weeks at the Country Club of Birmingham and give him a big hug. Because we compete day-in and day-out, but there's a reason we went to dinner last night together. I truly do cherish his friendship.

Q. What do you think of this event here? What do you think of stonewall as a course, a championship course? It's a very young course, only 23 years old. What did you think of it?

STEWART HAGESTAD: 23? That's almost as old as me. I thought it was great. This is my first experience with a championship. I thought it was a great match play course the way USGA set up with some of the tees and some of the pins. It was a great mix of being just challenging enough where the weather could kind of dictate how we had to play out there.

So I thought it was a tremendous set up. I thought it was a tremendous course. The length I thought was great. It was just long enough to really challenge you again for the weather to kind of dictate how you play and how you had to play certain holes.

Like number 8, for example, was like 420. That hole is so hard, and I don't know why. It's just so visually intimidating. There are a couple spots out here. 17 is the same way. 15 is the same way. 16 is the same way.

So even though it's compared to a U.S. Amateur it doesn't quite have the same yardage or anything like that. But around the greens, it really shows its teeth. And I thought it was a really great test as it relates to

match play and overall a really, really nice job by the USGA.

Q. Early in the afternoon round you missed a 20-footer on 1 and then you three-putt from a short distance on three. But at that point are you saying this isn't my day or were there negative thoughts in your mind? What's going on?

STEWART HAGESTAD: There were negative thoughts going, but at the same time, it's weird. I've had a feeling this whole week that if I could just grind it out and chip away at it, one hole at a time, I mean, bad golf shots happen, and it happens to everyone. If I could just make a couple birdies, and I said to my good friend Darren after I knocked it right, the only place you can't hit it after he knocks it right on 6. If I could just get a couple back and just scare him a little bit, maybe I could get myself back into this.

Because match play is such a momentum-driven game, the difference between being 2-up and 3-up is a lot. The difference between being 3-up and 4-up is a lot more, and you get where I'm going with that. So if I could get it from 4 to 3 and 3 to 2, and begin the snow ball, and at least get the tee box back where I could put a ball in play and make him think about it, it's such a little thing that really makes a big difference over the course of a day let alone a week.

Q. Why did the switch flip on where you start hitting your irons like you did? What triggered that, and what's it feel like?

STEWART HAGESTAD: Sure, and I don't want this to sound arrogant or cocky or anything like that, but I've always had a lot of confidence in my ball striking. One of the biggest compliments I received this year at the U.S. Am was from my coach, Chris Zambri, from USC who was out there. He told me that I was one of the best ball strikers he's seen, and I think he's giving me way more credit than I deserved with that one, personally, but I appreciate the compliment, for sure.

Yeah, a lot of these greens and a lot of these pin positions were in such positions where if you hit good shots with the right shape, you could get it close. And I was lucky enough to hit some good ones coming down the stretch.

But under pressure, Scott Harvey, again, he's the standard for this. All he does is hit good shots under pressure. On 11, for example, he's got an easy wedge, but he hits it to four feet and unfortunately didn't make the putt, but he just keeps putting pressure on it, and pressure on it. On 12 he makes a six to eight-footer for par. All he does is hit good shots under pressure.

Lucky enough for me I also hit some good ones under pressure and came away with a couple birdies. But I hit it great today. Coming down the stretch I was proud of the way I competed.

But as I mentioned before, it's one thing to hit great iron shots like I did on 13, for example. You can hit it close all day. You can hit it to 8, 10 feet all day, but you've still got to make putts. So that was the big thing that got the ball rolling.

Q. Last hole, the winning putt, were you helped by the previous putt you had earlier in the day on 9? Did that help you with the line at all?

STEWART HAGESTAD: Yeah, I'd say so a little bit. Yeah, it broke about a cup from left to right. Yeah, I think it did, absolutely. It broke a little, and that one I thought I hit with decent speed and it was a little short. But, yeah, I would say so. I knew more or less what it was going to do. I had a feeling Scott was going to make that putt. I just had a feeling we were going to have to make that one one way or the other.

So, yeah, I would say it definitely helped a little bit having seen, maybe not the whole thing, but a fraction of what it was going to do.

Q. You said you wanted to see a couple putts go in to get rolling?

STEWART HAGESTAD: Absolutely.

Q. What was it like after you saw the putts go in, how big was the hole looking to you?

STEWART HAGESTAD: It starts getting bigger and bigger. And everyone's felt it. I'm sure you guys are

all players and you've played the game for a period of time. Once you start that confidence of seeing the ball go in the hole -- do you guys ever have that feeling where you get up to the green and it's like for some reason this is going in? That's what it begins to start to feel like. It's true, yeah.

So once I got one or two to fall and to drop, the hole began to expand a little. And you have to believe in yourself, because, frankly, no one's going to do it for you. But once one got to go in with good speed, it began to open the floodgates. I put trust in myself and my preparation and having been there before. I'm lucky to have hit my line, hit my speed and do it the right way.

Q. Considering the head-to-head battles with Scott this summer in different ways, does this say to you now I'm a good player?

STEWART HAGESTAD: Absolutely. Ranking-wise, I saw the ranking yesterday on TV. I kind of laughed, and I was like, okay, whatever that thing says is my ranking, I guess. But, personally I've always believed and I don't play a lot of the bigger amateur events that a lot of guys have played. And that's because I chose to. I was working and I just can't take five days off work much less nine or ten or whatever. I need to get back in the office.

But the ranking, I just kind of laughed at it. I know I'm a good player, I think this helps solidify it a little in my head of maybe my potential and how good I can be. I don't want to keep going back to what I was saying earlier, but guys like Scott, Mike McCoy and Gene Elliott and Sammy those guys are really the standard. And if I can even come close to the category that they're in, you know. Mr. Zahringer is one who was up where I was for the summer. Guys like that, if I can even come close to the standard that they've set -- I laugh because in my mind even though we're close to those guys, those guys are in a league of their own. So, it's, you know, it's neat.

Q. What is your occupation?

STEWART HAGESTAD: I work in finance. I work at a real estate firm. We do acquisitions and development. It's called Oak Tree Residential. It's in New York City.

Q. You talked about (Indiscernible) on number 29, you walked back and you said one at a time and you lost the next hole.

STEWART HAGESTAD: What hole was 29?

Q. 11, 12.

STEWART HAGESTAD: Okay, got it.

Q. You lost the 12th hole, you won 11, lost the 12th hole. How do you go back to that mentality one hole at a time when you gained momentum and lost again?

STEWART HAGESTAD: I just wanted to go to sleep tonight knowing I left everything out there. I chose small targets. I made committed golf swings. I played cautiously aggressive. It's tough.

I mean, look, I'd be lying to you if I said otherwise. Yeah, you're 4-down after 12, so what's that? 29, I guess? 29, 30? You're 4-down with six holes to play. Not really where you want to be.

So, again, like I said, if I could just chip away at it, and scare him and get that 4 to 2, again, the difference between 4 and 2 in match play is a lot. Even if I was dormie with 2 to go, 17 and 18 are tough holes and he's got to go up and make good shots. I just wanted to be in a position where if I hit a good shot, I had to force him to hit a better one. So, yeah, 4-down.

Q. Actually, 4-down with five to go.

STEWART HAGESTAD: 4 down with five to go, yeah.

Q. Got to happen.

STEWART HAGESTAD: Yeah. Do it again.

Q. How long was the winning putt?

STEWART HAGESTAD: 14.

Q. Is the Walker Cup hat a little subliminal message here?

STEWART HAGESTAD: No, it's a special place, and I've been lucky enough to be out there. It's a very, very neat place, and I feel, again, humbled and honored to have been out there for a couple years. It's something I hope to earn my way on, but let's hope I can keep doing the things and stay in control and it would be an absolute dream come true.

Q. Just to clarify, your parents are members here?

STEWART HAGESTAD: My dad's a member and I'm a junior.