

U.S. Senior Amateur Championship

Quick Quotes

Thursday August 31, 2017

Sean Knapp

Q. 63rd U.S. Senior Amateur champion, Sean Knapp. I know you have a lot of emotions, a lot of things have happened over the last few hours. Take us through what the journey has been like over the last six days.

SEAN KNAPP: Boy, what's the right adjective to describe it. Certainly you would classify something in the terms of unexpected. Earlier this year I had high expectations. I've played in a lot of, quote-unquote, young-guy tournaments thinking that that would prepare me best. At the end of the day, just before I got here, weird things started happening. I wasn't playing as well. I cracked my driver in the first round. I played with three different drivers in three different days. To emerge -- and I don't mean that in any way as an excuse or disparaging to any other players. It was just the normal pressure that surrounds an event like this, and then can we take it to a different level because every swing just seemed like I don't know what's going to happen. To emerge victorious is such a blessing, and I'm not sure what to say. I'm very humbled.

Q. Talk about the match a little bit today. Nobody really had the upper hand until the very end. It was nip and tuck back and forth. Take us through the ups and downs.

SEAN KNAPP: Well, we've spoken about this numerous times, and I need to underscore it one more time. Nathan Smith and I have played so much, four-time winner of the Mid-Am, have played so much against each other and with each other, we're best friends. There's a formula, and I'm well aware of it. I can't always execute it. He can. There's other players that execute it far better than I. It's about being patient, not giving holes, and forcing your opponent to get uncomfortable, and if you can force them into that level of uncomfortability, they might make poor decisions. I'm not saying that that's what happened today because it was so nip and tuck, but certainly it kept my emotions at bay. And I need to just amplify on that line of thinking just by saying, I was very relaxed, and I mentioned this to you the other day about this final. You know, for a guy like me, exemptions are just such a -- I haven't made a USGA event since 2014, and I've been playing some pretty good golf. It's just so important to get those buggers. Knowing in the semis what it brought because I've been there in other Mid-Ams and then U.S. Ams, and then knowing what to get



to the semis brought, but also what the finals brought. Once I had kind of done that, all I said today was, look, all we're playing today is for the championship, and while that is an enormous thing, at the same time, I was very relaxed, very calm. I don't know why, the whole day it was the calmest I was in any match.

Q. How do you feel you played today? Didn't make a birdie, but match play --

SEAN KNAPP: I've been told. I've got this big thing over there that says W. No, I'm just teasing you, of course. That's part of what we just referenced earlier. I don't care how it looks or what it is. If you're making double bogey, I'm going to make bogey. If you're making par, I'm going to try to make birdie. Look, at the end of the day, in any U.S. Open, not that this was exactly like a U.S. Open setup, par is your friend. It's very difficult to get it under par. The way the USGA had the tournament -- the setup structure, it was very difficult. You could get them close to pins, but you were taking some risk. Obviously I didn't tie him up some of the shots that I could have earlier in the round. I think that's where the birdies can fly. But once you get down to the stretch and it's 11, it's just survival. If you're seeking pins, you're going to make mistakes.

Q. You mentioned the other day that you've had issues in the past where you found yourself feeling like I'm happy to be here.

SEAN KNAPP: That's a great point.

Q. And you were looking to get past that and really be aggressive and go for the win. What was your state of mind today?

SEAN KNAPP: Well, it was an extension. That's a great point that you were making. In the past, it might have been match play earlier in my career. Oh, boy, I made match play. I'm so happy. And then as time went on, it was this isn't successful unless we can win a few matches, a Mid-Am -- not so much at an Amateur but at a Mid-Am, and then finally you start to see how precious it is, an opportunity to get to that point. There's some self-examination that goes. Was I taking it too lightly, and I don't mean lightly in the sense, cavalier about it, I just mean lightly in the sense that, hey, I'm having a good week, things aren't going my way in a match, and it's okay, we'll be home tonight. That's not good enough. You really have to grind it out, and again, I give a lot of credit to Nathan. I've had a lot

of discussions about what it's been like. And it takes a little luck. It just does. Some putts go up, they creep in, you go, boy, that could have went on, and away you go.

The last two times in the Mid-Am in 2010 and 2012, I got to the semis, and you know, you're just like, we're going to do this every year, and then '13 I lost to Nathan in the final 16. He went on to win, and so you talk about exposure to Nathan and what it takes, and I lost in extra holes, and I really felt like it was so tough to accept that, and I would never allow -- and I didn't take him lightly, and I knew what to do to beat him, I just did everything but beat him. I just said, if I get in this situation again, I'm going to put the throttle down the best way we can, so that's what I tried to do.

Q. Did you ever think that it would not happen?

SEAN KNAPP: Oh, I always think it's not going to happen. I was thinking it wasn't going to happen in the first match, the second match. I will say that the category of players that I played in the last number of matches specifically, when I was playing Dave, at one point I got off to a good start and I was 3-up, and I'm like, I am not taking anything for granted. I could be 5-up and I will not take anything for granted. I'm going to continue to play the style of play that we just expounded on.

I guess, Paul, I kind of knew it was going to be a dogfight. He's hitting it great. Geez, I don't know where he picked up his extra 30 yards. I'm like, okay, the course is really better suited for him and the game he's going to play. I just said, okay, it is what it is, and there's a fine line between doing what I said earlier and then allowing it to happen, and I just said, look, if we lose, we're going to lose, but can we make him uncomfortable, and can I ever get to that point, and there were just a number of points where I was missing greens, and in my past I would have just sat there and said, hey, you're really playing bad, what's everybody thinking, you're not playing so well, this, that and the other. I didn't even care. I just said, get them up-and-down, move to the next one, stay tight. 14 did it. 14 kind of got me where I needed to be, so there we go.

Q. You mentioned wanting to make him uncomfortable. You were talking with a rules official out here a few minutes ago and you said you didn't want the match to start out in a contentious way. Was something going on on the 1st green?

SEAN KNAPP: Yeah, there was a question whether I conceded a putt on the 4th hole. Paul -- just to take you through it, I hit it in a greenside bunker, I had a long bunker shot. Paul had a chip that I thought he would get very close, and I elected to be very, very

aggressive with my play. I never would have done that in a stroke play examination. And I knock it over the back of the green. I'm playing hockey with it. So I've got to make a long putt for 5, and he hits his chip just like I thought, one and a half, two feet. I couldn't be exact. It was beyond the flag.

And there was some discussion about whether I conceded it when I went up, and I just felt like, absolutely, I would have done that under any terms. So I wasn't about to make an issue of it. I just -- you know, the thing about our match with Paul, and it pretty much went right through, but really with Dave Ryan and Dave Nocar yesterday, it just personified what amateur golf is about. There wasn't a lot of this, I'm going to knock it up to six inches, which is an obvious gimme, anybody is going to make that on their worst day. It wasn't like, I'm going to force you to do this. It was just pure golf, and that's the way it was with Paul. I know Paul. We've played a lot together. He's gotten the better of me at least two times, and I've mentioned to him, at least now we're even. But I didn't want it to start that way.

Q. Your approach shot on 17 came up, what, about a foot short and rolled back into that bunker?

SEAN KNAPP: Oh, my goodness.

Q. What did you hit in there?

SEAN KNAPP: I had 114. It was playing into the wind. That hole plays long. I don't care what the book said. The book says there's no uphill. It just plays long, and I played it like it was like a 135 shot. I'm just going to chip it on the front of the green. But I also had -- this is the brilliance of what the USGA does. I also have a good understanding of the way setups go. So if you play it to the middle of the green you're likely to three-putt because I knew it was on some crazy ridge over there. So I thought, I just have to hit a good shot. I've got to hit a great shot, and I've got to hit a great shot -- I've got to be passive aggressive, passive in the sense that you're trying to play defensively, aggressive that you had to hit a great shot. When I hit it, I'm just telling you, it was just a nick thin, and I'm like, just get up and we're perfect, and wasn't lucky enough. But Dave Brown made -- I can't tell you enough how many decisions -- and I think I'm a good reader of greens and just strategy. I think I do a good job of that, just having him on the bag made the difference. He said, cup out right, and I'm like, oh, do you think it ought to be a little more -- he said, cup out right. Boom, that went right in.

Q. You said you thought you hit a perfect shot yesterday --

SEAN KNAPP: There's another good point. Good question. Different wind, but yesterday I hit a little flip shot in there and it went mysteriously 12 yards long, and I got lucky it stayed in the fringe, and it was dead

there, but then it hit the pin. I won't say that the one led to another. I knew that played long yesterday, and I was surprised that it went so long yesterday. Today, I didn't think about yesterday's match. I was thinking about today's match with a different wind. And it played long. I still don't know how that went long yesterday.

Q. Was there a turning point in this match for you? Do you recall any particular hole, any particular shot?

SEAN KNAPP: That's easy. It was 10. Yeah, there's just no doubt about it. If you want to just even go further, take it to 11 and almost every hole started to build on that. 12, I thought I played the hole perfect, and behind a tree over there, even though the tree is really not in my way, it's growing over and I'm in the fairway and hit a great shot, now I've got to get up-and-down. 13, Paul wins, even though I thought I played that hole better. That's the way match play is. And then 14, I get the hole. And finally, I started, okay, now we're 2-up; can we just force a little more pressure on him, and we both got bad breaks on 16 to be where we were. He did not hit that bad of a drive. Camera guys are back there like great tee ball, and I'm like, yeah, me too. I get up there, and it is what it is. But that's just being a little fortunate. But I thought that 10 certainly was the turning point.

Q. Standing over that putt on No. 17 on the live stream, Nathan Smith was watching and he actually commented. He said, "Come on Knapper, knock this in. This is the putt you've been waiting for your whole life." Is that properly illustrated?

SEAN KNAPP: That's why he's won four times. Yeah. Yeah. It's really special. You know, to stroke it that way -- we talk about not making birdies, but I will -- and the director of local golf association director goes, has anybody ever won a match not birdieing a hole in the history of the event. I was like, well, do you have to be so negative?

But I made so many critical putts. I was up against the wall, right against -- 10, having to get it up-and-down, 11 to get it up-and-down, 12 to get it up-and-down, 14 to get it up-and-down, and you know, little dinky putt at 15, it's a nose outside the hole, and I'm like, are you kidding me, can we just take this away. And even the bunker shot at 16, there was a lot of nonsense that could go on there, and fortunately Paul made it a little bit easier there by going long. We talked about it on 16 with Dave, and I said -- he says, just aim it out there 15 feet, your friend, and well, that's sound advice. I knew the slope would curl in, and playing a lot of the western Pennsylvania, Oakmont greens, I'm like, this is so -- this is what you've prepared for your whole life, and all of a sudden, it's like, 17, you're (indiscernible). That's a

quick synopsis of it.

Q. You started playing relatively later than a lot of your contemporaries --

SEAN KNAPP: You guys are good.

Q. Any kind of basketball mentality that you bring to this game that through the years -- you've played it a long time, but just your mindset and the way you compete?

SEAN KNAPP: I'd say that it's primarily -- you can overdo your emotions. I think I was pretty calm out there, and not that I want to be a robot because I'm anything but that. I'm probably the opposite. And so you can -- I've allowed that to facilitate to bad play in the past. Now, to really amplify on what you said in a positive way, because I do think it's a very good question, I think it has to do with the conditioning and training. That's as simple as -- I prepare to play more. I prepare to do these kinds of things. You know, I just do a lot of things. I've got to do the little things more than everybody else. I don't have as much talent as a lot of these guys. To see it come to fruition, it's a blessing.

Q. You talked a lot about exemptions the last couple of days, so the U.S. Amateur, 2018 Pebble Beach, the U.S. Senior Open at Broadmoor, talk about what you're thinking about your upcoming schedule the next year or two?

SEAN KNAPP: Yeah, I haven't played Broadmoor. What I'm thinking is how old I am because I didn't know that the Senior Am was at Eugene. I played there in the Mid-Am. I didn't know that the Am was at Pebble Beach. I was there in '99. You start duplicating these things like 20 or 30 years in advance. I don't know that that's a good thing. But I'm just excited.

I think now I'm going to -- whereas I always set up my year and I would play state and local events, I don't know that I can afford to play. I have so many USGA events. I've always felt like if you made one or two, and there's been years I've been fortunate via the state team to make four, and you're like, wow, that's a lot of golf. It's going to be four or five next year, and going to have to pace myself, but I'm excited.

Q. Mid-Am next month?

SEAN KNAPP: Yeah, got to pick up the pieces. I know how to approach that. I like to think mentally, and that's just going to be gravy train. I won't take it for lightly, but it's like you're playing with house money now.

Again, same thing, same process. Got to make match play, know what it takes. I have a pretty good record in match play -- making match play at the Mid-Am. Get there and see what happens, and it'll be a little tighter

there.

Q. What was your father's name?

SEAN KNAPP: Roger, which is my official first name, although I go by Sean. I got a text that just so made me tear up this morning. My dad was a superintendent of schools, and he had a doctorate, and he always wanted you to call him Roger, which is interesting. He drove a pickup truck, beat up, rather than -- he managed a de facto -- he was like CEO of a corporation. Even through to his funeral, he did not have -- he didn't have it at a typical funeral home. He just had it in the church. He wanted it to be about God rather than him. He was a very humble man, and I never saw a man -- and he was a gifted athlete. He got a baseball scholarship. They didn't have a high school baseball team, for division 1. Pitched semi-pros for the White Sox. I've never seen a man with more talent who was more humble. The text that I received, I'm sorry to get off of that, was from one of the board members who used to regularly meet. Her name is Sue Martin, female, lady that's older now. She said, Sean, I just want to share something with you. She got my cell phone from my wife. Your dad, we'd go in and talk business and so forth, then once we got that, he would sit back, and even though he has five children, he was proud of each of the kids in our own way because he just had such a pride with you playing golf. And she goes, I can tell right now that he's smiling, and of course I'm sitting there, like I've got to play here soon. Anyway, so dad's name was Roger.

Q. When you drove back from Atlanta, you were going to Pennsylvania?

SEAN KNAPP: Yeah, yeah. He couldn't -- I've got to tell you a little postscript to that. So we make it back and I told you he put his (indiscernible) just in time. The next day I slept over because we didn't think he was going to make it. Next day, he woke up, he couldn't speak three sentences -- couldn't speak three words, let alone a sentence, and I hear him, and he said, can you give me some water. I get up and get some water. How are you feeling and everything. He wouldn't eat at that point. He knew it was done.

We carried on a two-hour conversation, including this one thing about this pickoff play when he was pitching, and he had a rival left arm, and they were doing this drill to simulate a pickoff play in stealing, and he zips it over to first, it hits the runner, ricochets, knocks him off, ricochets, hits the first base man in the forehead, ricochets off, and all he said, he goes, drill's over. And I'm like, I never heard that. We went on and had the greatest conversation for two hours, and then that night he died, and it was wonderful.

Q. What hospital?

SEAN KNAPP: He was in hospice at home. We had

the hospice there.

Q. Where is that, Oakmont?

SEAN KNAPP: Oakmont, yeah. So it was special. We're all going to go. Dad had a message. He was a very religious man. He helped so many people. That's his legacy. I'm not 5 percent of that. But I'm proud to say I'm his.