

# HAPPY TO BE HERE

In just his second season in the Met Area, an MGA Major and a national championship propelled **Stewart Hagestad** to **Player of the Year** honors.

BY TIM HARTIN

It's safe to say that Stewart Hagestad has adjusted well to the Met Area. He was an accomplished golfer prior to moving to New York City, but it's here that the native Californian's game has blossomed over the past two seasons. The winner of the 2016 MGA Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year Award, Hagestad has confirmed his position as one of the area's elite players and displayed his potential as one of the best amateurs in the country.

Hagestad, who grew up in Newport Beach and is a graduate of the University of Southern California, moved to Manhattan in July of 2014. In the midst of what he calls a "restless" off-season, Hagestad sought the scoop on the Met Area golf scene from his friend (and 2013 MGA Player of the Year) Max Buckley, who pointed him toward the MGA and its events. Hagestad immediately became a name to watch after debuting with a second-place finish at the Ike in 2015. That result was backed up with a semifinal run in the Met Amateur and a seventh-place spot in the Player of the Year Honor Roll at year's end.

In 2016, Hagestad continued to elevate his game. He added several highly respected area tournaments to his schedule and came through with consistent high finishes, but his breakthroughs came on the biggest stages as he claimed dramatic wins in both the Met Amateur and the U.S. Mid-Amateur. The accomplishments catapulted Hagestad to the coveted MGA Player of the Year title.

Though he hasn't been in the area long, he's well aware of the history and tradition he's joined in winning the award. "For as short a time that I've been a golfer in the Met Area, I'm lucky enough to be in the same sentence as the guys before me and be on that list of champions," says Hagestad, who plays out of Deepdale. "Hopefully I can at least light a candle to what those guys have been able to accomplish for so long."



Center: Stewart Hagestad raising the U.S. Mid-Amateur trophy. Clockwise from top left: In the semifinals of the U.S. Mid-Am; at the Ike; with the Met Am trophy at Fairfield; putting at the Met Am.





Hagestad shaking hands with Scott Harvey after the Mid-Am final.

The 25-year-old began the season with a convincing four-shot win at the Brae Burn Invitational in early June. He tied for seventh place at the Hochster Memorial, then flew cross-country to compete in the George C. Thomas Invitational at Los Angeles Country Club days later, finishing second to Scott Harvey in a playoff. While he earned no player of the year points for the result, the experience paid dividends later in the summer. “At the George Thomas this year,” Hagestad says, “I had the chance to play with Mike McCoy in the second round (past U.S. Mid-Am champ and Walker Cupper) and then in the third round I played with Scott (obviously the same). I had the chance to pick their brains, watch the way they handled themselves, and more than anything just establish a general friendship with both of them. When we went to the playoff out there, it was kind of an awakening: ‘Hey, I can hang with this guy.’”

He jetted back east to compete in the Ike, which began two days after the Thomas Invitational ended. He once again made a run at the title, finishing third. In July, Hagestad took second at the Arcola Cup and qualified for his seventh U.S. Amateur. At this point in the season, he was off to a good start but stood more than 300 points behind leader Trevor Randolph of Arcola, who had already notched three victories including the Hochster and logged three more top-four finishes (Randolph’s outstanding year-end total of 1185 points would have won the Award in most seasons, including two of the last three.)

But Hagestad was about to set off on an incredible run over the next month and a half, beginning with the Met Amateur at Country Club of Fairfield. He scorched the course with

record-setting rounds of 61-64 in on-site qualifying and earned medalist honors by 10 strokes. Though thrilled with the start, he maintained focus on the end goal: winning.

“It’s great to win medalist and play great that first day, but when you look back on who won it, no one ever looks at who was stroke-play medalist,” said Hagestad. “You always look at who lifted the trophy.”

Pitted against rising star Ethan Ng of Fiddler’s Elbow in the championship match, the pair played stellar golf and combined for just five bogeys. Thirty-six holes weren’t enough to determine a champion, but a birdie on the 38th hole earned Hagestad the victory and 275 more Player of the Year points, placing him just three points behind Randolph.

Competing in his first Met Open, Hagestad closed with rounds of 71-70 on the challenging Glen Oaks Club course, placing him in a tie for 11th and second low amateur for 110 points. That moved him to the top of

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the standings. “I didn’t want to look at the points every week,” said Hagestad when talking about whether the race had any effect on his scheduling. “I didn’t think about it much until I was coming down the stretch. But, when the opportunity presented itself, it turned into a priority.”

Hagestad then took part in his first U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship, having reached his requisite twenty-fifth birthday back in April. He easily advanced to match play at Stonewall in Elverson, Pa., and never trailed in either of his first two matches. His first deficit greater than one hole came in the quarterfinals, which he overcame and produced a 2-up win. After a 4-and-2 victory in the semifinals, another title was on the line against Scott Harvey, the top-ranked mid-am in the world.

“I really didn’t feel (as the ‘ranking’ would show) as if it was David vs. Goliath,” Hagestad wrote in an email. “I genuinely felt like it was more two friends, with a very mutual respect for each other and their golf games, going up against each other. If I had not had the chance

to spend time with McCoy and Scott at the Thomas, I don’t think I would [have been] as confident in that position as I am today.”

In the Mid-Am final, Hagestad trailed by five holes as late as the 25th hole and stood four down with five to play, but his competitive nature kept him fighting through. Birdie after birdie he climbed back, winning the 35th and 36th holes to even the match and send it to extra holes – his third significant final of the year to go into sudden death.

The first playoff hole was the par-3 ninth, and Hagestad capped off the comeback victory with his fifth birdie in a six-hole span, making a 14-footer after Harvey had missed his putt from a similar length. He earned a whopping 400 points for the national title and suddenly owned a 300-plus point lead of his own.

While the sudden accolades were special, Hagestad points to a phone call that will most likely stand as the lasting memory.

“I’ll remember the trophy and I’ll remember some of the comeback now that I’ve had a chance to think about it,” he said, “but I still maintain that the coolest part of that entire day was the opportunity to call my mom and dad and share that moment with them.” Hagestad has lived away from home since he was 15, first attending the International Junior Golf Academy in South Carolina, then college at USC, and now residing in New York. While Hagestad says he’s always pushed himself competitively, his parents set the foundation for the man he’s become. “From the standpoint of how to manage myself and how I act, that’s one hundred percent them,” he said. “I was lucky to have parents that held the standard very high and have supported me.”

Down the season’s final stretch, Randolph tightened the point standings, but the two tied for second at the Boff Invitational, the final point-eligible event for both competitors, leaving Hagestad with 1273 points—the highest total since Mike Miller’s 1330 in 2012—and the prestigious title of MGA Jerry Courville Sr. Player of the Year.

Hagestad’s sights are already set on the 2017 season, and his goals are simple: compete at the Masters (for which he will receive an official invitation thanks to his U.S. Mid-Am win), and earn an opportunity to represent the United States by playing on the Walker Cup team when the Matches are held at Los Angeles Country Club, where his father is a member (and he is a junior member). One thing we know for sure: his game travels well. ■