

## Olympic Golf - Men's Competition – Third Round Notes and Summary

July 31, 2021

Kasumigaseki Country Club - East Course - Par 71, 7,466 yards

### Leaders/Leader Notes

Xander Schauffele	USA	68-63-68—199 (-14)
Hideki Matsuyama	Japan	69-64-67—200 (-13)
Paul Casey	Great Britain	67-68-66—201 (-12)
Carlos Ortiz	Mexico	65-67-69—201 (-12)

<b>Xander Schauffele</b>	
Olympic Ranking	3
Official World Golf Ranking	5
Professional Victories	4
2016 Rio Olympics	N/A
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schauffele was going to work on his driving with his father and swing coach to sort out his difficulties from Saturday</li> <li>“Fortunately,” he said, “he’s been my only swing coach, so I can tell you it’s probably one of four things.”</li> <li>With his father of German-French descent and mother born in Chinese Taipei born and raised in Japan, he credits his upbringing with giving him a resilient mentality, saying: “I always felt I was mentally tougher than the other kids.”</li> <li>Schauffele was the Big West Conference Freshman Player of the Year at Long Beach State University before transferring to San Diego State</li> </ul>

<b>Hideki Matsuyama</b>	
Olympic Ranking	6
Official World Golf Ranking	20
Professional Victories	15
2016 Rio Olympics	N/A
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matsuyama made seven straight pars on the back nine Saturday before breaking the string with a birdie on No. 17</li> <li>He has a number trophies and medals, including a gold at the 2011 World University Games and Prime Minister’s Award following his 2021 Masters win. But he doesn’t know how winning a medal will feel versus winning a major, noting “third place is still celebrated as well as second,” versus only the winner being celebrated in a major</li> </ul>

<b>Paul Casey</b>	
Olympic Ranking	8
Official World Golf Ranking	22

Professional Victories	21
2016 Rio Olympics	N/A
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Owns 21 professional wins worldwide, but has yet to capture a major championship title; finished in the top-10 at least once in each of the four major championships</li> <li>• Won the 2004 World Cup of Golf for England with Luke Donald as his partner</li> <li>• Played college golf at Arizona State; was inducted into the Arizona State University Sports Hall of Fame in 2010</li> </ul>

<b>Carlos Ortiz</b>	
Olympic Ranking	20
Official World Golf Ranking	61
Professional Victories	4
2016 Rio Olympics	N/A
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ortiz's boxer roommate came close but did not win a medal for Mexico; Ortiz is motivated to win one to "make it up for him and all the other [Mexican] athletes who work so hard."</li> <li>• Mexico has collected just 2 bronze medals thus far during the Tokyo</li> <li>• His caddie is Michael Kerr, the national coach and putting coach for both Ortiz and teammate Abraham Ancer</li> </ul>

## Summary

### Closing birdie maintain's Schauffele's 1-stroke lead heading into final round

**KAWAGOE, JAPAN** – American Xander Schauffele enters Sunday's final round of the men's Olympic golf tournament maintaining the one-stroke lead he held at the beginning of the day, though now the closest pursuer is Japan's own golf hero, Hideki Matsuyama, who replaced Mexico's Carlos Ortiz as Schauffele's closest pursuer at Kasumigaseki Country Club.

Schauffele did so with a round of 3-under par 68, which on the surface might appear to be a standard, solid round of golf. But looks can be deceiving, which became clear to those watching his opening tee shot, which immediately had him pointing far left. He didn't hit his first fairway until the 8<sup>th</sup> hole. But he still had enough in his arsenal to get through, including a brilliant 9-iron (from the fairway) on No. 18 that led to an easy birdie-3 and a return to his solo lead.

"Golf is funny, you kind of have to fall back on parts of your game when other parts aren't working," he said. "I think I feel like yesterday I wouldn't say I was firing on all cylinders but things were clicking kind of coming home and, man, was it a different day today. So, I'm going to try and get some better feels on the range going into tomorrow."

Throughout the day, Schauffele withstood the challenges thrown his way, ultimately staving off an impressive list of contenders before that final exclamation point on the 18<sup>th</sup> hole, that gave him a 14-under 199 total. That included his two playing competitors, Matsuyama and Ortiz.

Matsuyama, who undoubtedly would have drawn massive crowds in this golf-crazed country had fans been allowed on site, overcame an opening bogey to shoot 67 and is alone at 13-under, while Ortiz shot 69 that included a closing bogey and enters Sunday tied with Paul Casey of Great Britain (66), two strokes behind. Four

others are another stroke back, including Rory McIlroy of Ireland (67), Sebastián Muñoz of Colombia (66), Mito Pereira of Chile (68) and first-round leader Sepp Straka of Austria (68).

“I could have had a bad attitude or whatnot, but hung tough, fell back on certain parts of my game to hold me tight,” Schauffele said. In part, because of his putting. “Your putter doesn't know how bad you're swinging it, it's a completely different part of the game. So I made that joke to my caddie on 9 saying, if I can roll this in, it's ugly, but we're getting it done right now. So I would like tomorrow to be a little bit more fun all around.”

Matsuyama is carrying the weight of his nation into the final round, a feat of strength he couldn't have imagined after contracting COVID-19, the same culprit that is robbing him of those onsite fans. “I definitely could not have believed it,” he said. “To be honest, the endurance part of my game has been struggling a little bit, but it's held up, thankfully it's held up the last few days, so it's going to hopefully it's going to hold up tomorrow as well.”

He has played in final pairings before, but this will be a totally new experience for him.

“This is my first time playing the Olympics, so I'm not sure what to experience,” Matsuyama said. “But I'm sure it's going to be a new great experience, so and also not sure what kind of preparation I'll be able to put in before tomorrow's round, but I'm going to do my best.”

The round, which started under a bright, penetrating sun and – finally – no forecast of afternoon storms, turned into a free-for-all with early starters taking advantage of the ideal scoring conditions to bunch up the leaderboard. By the time the final grouping of Schauffele, Matsuyama and Ortiz had played seven holes, there momentarily was a five-way tie for the lead at 11-under (with Casey and Ireland's Shane Lowry joining the fray), with five others within two strokes.

Schauffele, Matsuyama and Ortiz all made birdie-4 on No. 8 to move to 12-under, then Schauffele regained the solo lead with a birdie-3 on No. 11, which Matsuyama parred and Ortiz bogeyed to drop two strokes behind. Ortiz then came back with a birdie-3 on No. 13 to rejoin Matsuyama, one stroke back.

Schauffele added another birdie-3 on No. 15 to move two ahead Ortiz, Matsuyama and now Casey, who finished off his strong round of 66 with birdies on the last two holes. But another two-stroke swing occurred on the par-3 16<sup>th</sup> as Schauffele made bogey and Ortiz birdie, putting them in a tie at 13-under par, one stroke ahead of Matsuyama and Casey.

The day was settled after Matsuyama birdied No. 17 and 18 produced Schauffele's go-ahead birdie and Ortiz's bogey.

“It's tricky out here,” Ortiz said. “You get out of the position and you have to find a way to get it back in position. I felt I didn't maybe make as many putts as I wanted, I still rolled the ball fine, but I'm happy, I am in a great position for tomorrow and that's what matters.”

As are a number of players, including the final grouping of Schauffele, Matsuyama and Casey.

“I played with Xander in the third and fourth day together at the Masters,” Matsuyama said. “I'm sure Xander will come out determined to win the gold medal tomorrow, so hopefully on my end too I'm going to come out strong on the mental side.”

## **Other Notes/Quotes**

**Another day, another record-tying 63**

Sungae Im of Korea entered the third round 12 strokes off the lead and started in relative obscurity on the 10<sup>th</sup> tee due to a split-tee start caused by multiple weather delays Friday. By the end of the day, he had moved to within six of the lead with an 8-under 63 to tie the Olympic Games 18-hole scoring record. Im's round included 10 birdies, including four in a row on his first nine (Nos. 13-16).

"Before I went out for tee shot, I told myself, 'I will try to make just 10 birdies today', then I actually did it," Im said. "So I think that I still have chance to win. Today, I played as I planned. I made birdies where I needed birdies, and I made putts where I needed that putts. So I finished with good scores.

"Tomorrow, I will play more aggressive than today," he said. "I will try to aim right to the pin, if tee shots stay on the fairway. So I need to keep this good momentum to tomorrow. I will try to keep this good momentum and form until end of final round."

### **Mito Pereira continues playing with confidence**

Entering this week, Mito Pereira was perhaps seen as Chile's other Olympic entrant, with young star and good friend Joachin Niemann typically commanding more attention. But by the time the interrupted second round was completed Saturday morning, Pereira was the one challenging for the lead, tied for fourth just three strokes behind leader Xander Schauffele of the USA with rounds of 69-65. He remained in contention at 11-under par following Saturday's 68, while Niemann made a move with a 66 to 8-under 205.

Pereira's strong performance shouldn't come as a complete surprise, considering what he's done recently on the Korn Ferry Tour and PGA TOUR. After claiming his first victory on the Korn Ferry Tour in 2020, he came back to register two consecutive victories in June to earn his PGA TOUR membership. He then made three straight cuts on TOUR, including a T5 and T6 before traveling to Tokyo. It certainly gave him confidence ... and then some.

"More than confident, it's more like believing in yourself that you can do it," he said. "Obviously you get three wins on the Korn Ferry it's not easy and then a couple TOUR starts to get top-5 and top-6 in PGA TOUR events, it's a big deal for me. Like you never know if you can do it or not. So, I mean, I'm in a good place right now and just trying to enjoy it as much as I can."

### **Paul Casey living the dream, and making the most of it**

Paul Casey of Great Britain soaked in the drama and excitement from afar in 2016 and what it meant to compatriot Justin Rose when he golf's first Olympic gold medal in more than a century. "I mean, he pulled that gold medal out of the bag every five minutes, didn't he, to show us," Casey said.

So qualifying for the Tokyo Olympics became what turned into a five-year quest for him. So much so that during the final round of this year's U.S. Open, the final qualifying tournament for the Olympics, he was "only thinking about this," he said. He actually thought he had missed the Open cut and his opportunity to represent Great Britain, but he slipped in under the cut and had a strong weekend to tie for 7<sup>th</sup> place.

Now that he's here, his priority shifted from simply wanting to be an Olympian to being "incredibly serious and perform at my best and try to win a medal." He's obviously has managed to do so.

"I was a massive fan of the Olympics as a kid growing up and loved watching it during the summers," Casey said. "I never thought I would be sitting here as an athlete in the Olympic games until seeing golf's inclusion back in Rio and then Justin's brilliant performance. I guess we got a lot to try and live up to. We're defending gold, technically, Team GB. I couldn't be more proud, and to be included in this great Team GB team. Yeah, it's honestly, even this week I feel kind of invigorated and I feel passion and pride to be wearing this shirt and to be competing and I couldn't think of anything greater than winning a gold medal as a golfer."

Following Saturday's third round, he's one giant step closer.

#### **Fleetwood finds his footing, shoots up the leaderboard with a 64**

After struggling to gain any momentum the first two days, Paul Casey's teammate, Tommy Fleetwood, of Great Britain found his footing with a 7-under par 64 which included five birdies on the closing nine.

"I've been struggling for momentum a lot recently," he said. "I feel my game has been coming back and it's just about getting those good rounds under your belt. That's the lowest round I've had for a very long time, really, and I think sort of got to take that back with me and think about that and draw on that. It was just nice. I just got on a run and that was great and it was nice to come down the stretch feeling like constantly giving myself chances and moving up the board. We all know what places matter this week, so it's nice to actually be wherever I am within touching distance wherever I am."

#### **Cameron Smith rebounds from bad break at end of 2<sup>nd</sup> round**

Cameron Smith of Australia crept into contention on Saturday with five birdies enroute to a 66, leaving him 5 strokes behind leader Xander Schauffele. But there's a feeling of what might have been after a brutally bad break on the final hole Friday.

Smith was 6 under par for the day when he hit his tee shot into the thick rough. He tried to play safely toward the left side of the green to avoid the water bordering the front /left side of the green. But his ball hit steps to the stands and kicked all the way across the fairway, into the pond. He ended up making double-bogey 6, falling to 4-under for the tournament and 7 strokes off the lead.

"That was pretty unfortunate," Smith said. "I was trying to hit it down there on the left and kind of the rough caught the heel a little bit, went a little bit further left than I anticipated, but yeah, I mean it was pretty frustrating day as it was, I felt like I did a lot of good stuff and didn't get the most out of my round and then to finish like that is kind of a bit crappy."

But his bogey-free round Saturday leaves him in good standing heading into the final round.

"I thought 5-, 6-under today would get me close enough to where if I had another good one tomorrow, I could be in the running for a medal," Smith said. "So, yeah, it was nice to go out there, especially after a pretty poor start to kind of hang in there and shoot that."

#### **First-round contender Thomas Pieters reappears after a disappointing second round**

You'll recall that Thomas Pieters of Belgium overcame a brief illness to shoot 65 in the first round, but disappeared with a 5-over 76 in the second round. Well, he reappeared on Saturday, starting on the back nine with a 5-under 30 that featured three birdies and an eagle-2 on the 17<sup>th</sup> hole, and finishing with a 7-under par 64. He enters Sunday at 8-under 205 and an outside chance at a medal, which eluded him five year ago in the Rio Olympics when he finished fourth.

"I started off pretty decent," he said. "I was 2-under through 5. Then I had a lovely eagle on 17 (his second eagle-2 of the tournament). I hit a pitch shot from about 40 meters I think and it dropped in. So that's always a bonus. Then made a birdie on 18, so I really had a fantastic front nine ... well, which is the back nine and then

kind of kept it going on the front. Made a really stupid bogey on my 17th hole, on the 8th. But all in all, very happy.”

And if he manages to play well enough to medal?

“Well, it would mean the world to me,” Pieters said. “Being from such a small country, only two medals until now, so, yeah, that's like winning a major for me being from Belgium. So that would mean -- any medal, I mean right now I would be very happy with bronze. So, I probably need something like 8-under tomorrow, 9-under, so I need to play the round of my life tomorrow.”