

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

August 1, 2021

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

Medalists

Gold	Xander Schauffele	USA	68-63-68-67—266 (-18)
Silver	Rory Sabbatini	Slovakia	69-67-70-61—267 (-17)
Bronze	*C.T. Pan	Chinese Taipei	74-66-66-63—269 (-15)

* Won seven-player sudden-death playoff on 4th hole

Leader(s) after Each Round (to par/lead):

Year	R1	R2	R3	R4
2016	Marcus Fraser (AUS) 63 (-8/+3)	Marcus Fraser (AUS) 132 (-10/+1)	Justin Rose (GBR) 201 (-12/+1)	Justin Rose 268 (-16/+2)
2020	Sepp Straka (AUT) 63 (-8/+1)	Xander Schauffele (USA) 131 (-11/+1)	Xander Schauffele (USA) 199 (-14/+1)	Xander Schauffele 266 (-18/+1)

Winner's position after each round:

Year	Champions	R1	R2	R3	R4
2016	Justin Rose (GBR)	T4 (-4)	T4 (-6)	1 st (-12)	1 st (-16)
2020	Xander Schauffele (USA)	T12 (-3)	1 st (-11)	1 st (-14)	1 st (-18)

Xander Schauffele	
Olympic Ranking	3
Official World Golf Ranking	5
Professional Victories	4
2016 Rio Olympics	N/A
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schauffele hadn't won since the 2020 TOUR Championship He had come close since then with 6 top-5 finishes Xander said he wanted to win this for his father, whose own Olympic quest in the decathlon was ended by a drunk driver ... Xander said he knew his dad was going to cry when they embraced. "Luckily he had shades on."

Rory Sabbatini	
Olympic Ranking	39
Official World Golf Ranking	204
Professional Victories	6
2016 Rio Olympics	N/A
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the oldest player in the field at age 45 His closing 61 broke the former men's Olympic record by 2; several players had matched the 63 this week It also is the lowest score for all three tournaments since golf's return to the Olympics (62 was recorded in women's event in Rio)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sabbatini said he actually had “one of the worst warmups I’ve ever had in my golfing career” before his career round
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C.T. Pan	
Olympic Ranking	43
Official World Golf Ranking	208
Professional Victories	3
2016 Rio Olympics	N/A
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Like Sabbatini, Pan started 7 shots back but matched the former Olympic record of 63 to make the 7-way playoff After the slow start, he had consecutive 66s to move into contention the final day Pan said his wife, Michelle, kept the mood light as his caddie. “She’s a great caddie.” Pan had missed 10 cuts on the PGA TOUR in 2021, including his last 3 tournaments His only top-10 finish was a T3 at The Honda Classic in March

Summary

Schauffele staves off Sabbatini’s record round to win gold; CT Pan wins bronze

KAWAGOE, JAPAN – While one swing by American Xander Schauffele nearly changed the dynamics of the men’s golf tournament Sunday at Kasumigaseki Country Club, it was the 61 strokes of eventual silver medalist Rory Sabbatini, representing Slovakia, that really shook the leaderboard and the chase for Olympic gold.

Schauffele ultimately emerged the winner on this hot, sunny day, clinching his golden moment with one final, gutsy par-save on the final hole for a 4-under par 67 and 18-under total. But it took the mental resilience he said came by way of his upbringing, fostered by a father of German-French descent and Chinese Taipei mother who was raised in Japan. Consider it a respectful nod to the culture of the host country, where his grandparents still live.

“I felt like for the most part of the day I stayed very calm,” Schauffele said. “I usually look very calm but there’s something terrible happening inside at times. So I was able to learn on those moments where I’ve lost coming down the stretch, where I hit a bad shot or a bad wedge or a bad putt and sort of lose my cool. But I felt like today I really, I thought I had a one-shot lead going into 16 or 17 and I looked at the board and I saw Rory shot 61, so that was a nice wake up call for me; thank goodness there was a board there or I wouldn’t have known. Yeah, it was a roller coaster day for me especially on that back nine coming in and just happy I could fall back on parts of my game to sort of pull me through.”

Until that one swing on the par-5 14th hole produced a wayward drive and bogey, Schauffele remained undeterred through a scoring assault that was unfolding ahead, led by Sabbatini’s brilliant record-setting round that concluded more than an hour ahead of him. In fact, the perfect scoring conditions led to a seven-player elimination for the bronze medal, which was finally decided on the fourth extra hole with C.T. Pan of Chinese Taipei beating Collin Morikawa of the USA with a par 4 on No. 18. Both had matched the former Olympic record of 63 Sunday to get into the playoff.

Before the late drama unfolded, it appeared to be Schauffele’s private coronation. He entered the day leading Japan’s Olympic hope, Hideki Matsuyama, by one. Then birdies on the first two holes extended his lead to

three and indicated the work he had done with his father/swing coach, Stefan, the evening before had resolved some driving issues that developed in round three.

He added two more birdies and seemingly was cruising along until No. 14, where he badly pushed his drive that ended up in dense underbrush and forced a penalty drop. Schauffele managed to save bogey, but that dropped him into a tie with Sabbatini at 17-under par ... and his internal battle was on.

"I was cruising pretty nice, I saw that I had a three-shot lead going into 14 and made an absolute mess of the hole," Schauffele said. "I really tried to keep my head down from that point on and I saw the massive board on 16. So the early putts that fell and the good shots were nice for a cushion and it was fortunately just enough for me to squeak by finishing up."

While Schauffele had four holes ahead of him, Sabbatini was waiting with his wife and caddie, Martina, to see how it would unfold. He had done everything he could, putting together a masterpiece that consisted of 10 birdies, and eagle-2, five pars and two bogeys. The closing birdie on 18 came with an emphatic fist pump as the ball approached the hole, giving Sabbatini the men's Olympic record by two strokes.

"I was out there today and I kept just trying to remind myself, okay, don't think ahead, don't think ahead, just enjoy the moment that you're in because you don't know what it's going to end, just enjoy every hole as it comes," Sabbatini said. "It just seemed like every time I kind of had a hiccup out there I was like, oh, maybe this is the end of the run, but okay. And then all of a sudden, I kicked back into gear. So it was a lot of fun and it was just one of those rare days that you have on the golf course."

Schauffele finally managed to retake the lead with a birdie-3 on the 17th hole, which was shortened to just 305 yards. But then on No. 18, another pushed drive forced Schauffele to lay up into the fairway, leaving a wedge to the hole. Undeterred, he calmly wedged to four feet and holed the par putt.

"Well, I tell you what, it (the wait) was for a long time," said Sabbatini, who at 45 was the oldest player in the field. "It seemed like it was inevitable that Xander was going to win and then all of a sudden he created some excitement for us. So, he definitely kind of put me back on edge waiting there at the end.

"It was fun," he added. "He played fantastic, he's a great champion and I'm just happy to be able to stand anywhere near him on the podium."

Once that drama was settled, it was time to settle the bronze medal winner in a star-packed field that also included Matsuyama (who shot 67), Paul Casey of Great Britain (68), Rory McIlroy of Ireland (67), Mito Pereira of Chile (67) and Sebastián Muñoz of Colombia (67). It was so large, it required splitting into two groups.

Matsuyama and Casey were eliminated first, followed by Muñoz, then Pereira and McIlroy.

"I was not able to deliver the performance I was hoping for," Matsuyama said. "At the same time, the positive is that I was able to contend. At one point of the round, there was a moment where I could potentially catch up and move past the leaders. But I just was not able to put it together at the end. There are somethings that I've identified that I need to work on, which I hope to work on moving forward."

Morikawa bogeyed the final hole after his approach to the 18th green plugged in the steep upslope of the fronting bunker. Pan sank a par-saving putt for the medal.

"Very satisfying," Pan said. "It came as a surprise to me too. After day one, plus 3, 74, I remember I texted one of my good friends and I was like, the struggle is real. So it's quite a turnaround for this week winning the bronze medal that I couldn't even think about it, didn't even think about it after Thursday's round. So overall that was a very happy ending."

Morikawa, on the other hand, thought his approach would make the green. "It was a long four holes and I thought my shot was going to be all right and just mishit it," he said. "CT played great and we had to shoot 8-under for both of us to get in this playoff for bronze. So, it sucks, but hopefully it's not a last and hopefully we'll be back in four years."

McIlroy for one came away more determined than ever to earn an Olympic medal.

"Yeah, it does, it makes me even more determined going to Paris (in 2024) and trying to pick one up," he said. "It's disappointing going away from here without any hardware, I've been saying all day I never tried so hard in my life to finish third. But it's been a great experience, today was a great day to be up there in contention for a medal ... certainly had a different feeling to it than I expected and yeah, as I said I'm already looking forward to three years' time and trying to go at least one better but hopefully three better."

Casey, on the other hand, at age 44 is unsure whether he will get another chance at the Olympics, But he made the most of this opportunity, playing his way into the final pairing after tying with Carlos Ortiz of Mexico for third.

He eloquently summed up the Olympic experience, saying, "This is my first Olympics, so I think that's the one thing I witnessed a lot this week is there's triumph and there's the heart ache and we have seen it in the (Olympic) Village we have soon it in Team GB (Great Britain). Now you've seen it here on the golf course as well. So, I mean, first of all, what a day to play the final group in the Olympics with Hideki and then Xander gold medalist in Japan. Brilliant. For me that was one of the coolest rounds to be a part of. Sure, I wish I could have got my driver working a bit better and I struggled, but I battled and I'm so very proud of how hard I worked and tried to squeeze as much out of my game as I possibly could. Would love to have brought a medal home, not just for myself but for Team GB, would have been the ultimate. But the whole week has been phenomenal. I've made friends, can't say enough good things about my experience this week."

It was a common thread throughout the week, which ended with a most memorable day, particularly for the medal winners.

"I feel good," Schauffele said of winning the gold medal in Japan, considering his heritage. "I maybe put more pressure on myself to go win this more than anything else for quite some time ... And my ties here with my grandparents living here and my mom growing up here as well, there's just all these things that sort of motivated me to do better, be better. And maybe I put more pressure on myself but it was sort of more than just golf for me and I'm just really, really happy and fortunate to be sitting here."

Other Notes/Quotes

Behind every great round is a great caddie ... or wife?

Might be a saying in there somewhere. That certainly seemed to be the case in the silver/bronze pairing that included Rory Sabbatini, representing Slovakia, and C.T. Pan of Chinese Taipei. Both had their wives caddying for them this week – Michelle on C.T.'s bag and Martina on Rory's. And while it might have taken some time, the combination certainly paid off on Sunday. Sabbatini set a new Olympic scoring record with a blistering round of 10-under 61, while Pan tied the former record of 63. When they finished, Sabbatini was sitting alone in second place and Pan was tied for third with three others. But there was still a long wait ahead to see if they had done enough for medal. At least, they could do so in good company.

"I had the privilege of playing with CT today, so we kind of spurred each other one and he played some fantastic golf and down the end there suddenly I wasn't so worried about Xander I was worried about CT" Sabbatini said. "So I tried to keep my foot on the gas to keep ahead of him. I think that kind of set the stage for us to put a little bit of pressure on Xander without him knowing."

Strong showing for Chile

Chile had a particularly strong showing this week with Mito Pereira tying for third and going into a seven-way playoff for the bronze medal and Joaquin Niemann T10 after closing rounds of 67 and 65, respectively.

“Just a great experience and it was great to play for something bigger than me, for my country, so absolutely taking that out,” said Pereira, who had a very makeable birdie putt to win on the second playoff hole but saw it lip out. “I can't believe that lip out just happened. It's crazy. I hit a really good shot and it was a perfect putt and I don't know what happened.”

While Pereira jumped into contention from the outset, Niemann had a slow start with opening rounds of 70 and 69 before shooting 66-65 on the weekend.

“Overall, it was a great week,” Niemann said. “Obviously, I wanted to play better the first two days to give myself a better chance for the weekend, but, yeah, I'm really proud of the way I played on the last two days and giving myself a chance on the last couple holes where I couldn't make some birdies there. But, yeah, I'm pretty happy the way I finished and hopefully we can somehow win a medal.”

It ultimately didn't happen, but Niemann came away with a positive memory. “It was a good experience being in Japan being in my first Olympics, I'm going to really remember my first Olympics. I enjoyed it. Yeah, I'm excited to come back and hopefully get another chance [in Paris].”

Thomas recovers with a 65, ending a memorable Olympic experience on a positive note

It wasn't the week that world No. 4 Justin Thomas wanted or expected, but he at least gained some satisfaction with a closing round of 65 after struggling mightily with his putting the first three days. He finished 10 under par, well behind gold medal teammate Xander Schauffele.

“I think the scores are pretty self-explanatory,” he said after playing the first three rounds in 4-under par. “But it was nice to play well today. The experience was great, it's a shame that there wasn't able to be fans because Japan always has an unbelievable turnout and just with the amount of volunteers that were here, let alone if fans could have been here, it would have made a special week even more special. So, it was a shame, but it's great, I mean with all that's going on in the world, especially here, we're fortunate that we were able to compete and it's pretty cool to say that I'm an Olympian.”

Asked about the overall Olympic experience, Thomas said, “It's just, it's so different. It was cooler than I thought it was. I'm more proud of being here than I thought I would be. I thought I would be proud, but the first like day or two I immediately found out that this is like the coolest thing I've ever been a part of. The Ryder Cup is cool, the Presidents Cup's cool, but this is just so different. I grew up watching the Ryder Cup, the Presidents Cup, the majors, and never grew up watching this, so no one was ever able to relay or say how it felt being an Olympian, especially a golfer. And so, it was really -- I was never hitting putts as an 8, 10-year-old on the putting green to win the Olympics and win a gold medal. So, I think when you don't have the ability to dream something, when you get here it's, it can sometimes just take you by surprise and this definitely exceeded that.”

Playing with the yardages

Several interesting facts about Sunday's course set-up: The 4th hole was playing as the longest par-3 of the week at 248 yards. Conversely, the 10th hole was the shortest par 3 of the week at 175 yards. And adding to the potential closing drama, the 17th hole, which averaged 344 yards over the first three days, was shortened to a temptingly reachable 305 yards. Only the 6th hole, which surrendered several eagles this week, played shorter at 294 yards on Friday.

Quiet as a Fox

It became early on that the course was ripe for scoring. While Rory Sabbatini was grabbing attention by moving quickly into contention with six under through eight holes, Ryan Fox was rather quietly polishing off a round of 64 with a six-birdie 29 on the closing nine.

“It was just a little too late,” said Fox, who entered the day plus-2 for the tournament. “I actually played quite nicely all week and got nothing out of my rounds and it was kind of the opposite today. I hit a lot of good shots, but when I was in trouble, I made some pars and when I hit good shots I made birdie, which is, that’s been the opposite this week. So it was nice to get a decent round under the belt.”

It capped what has been a rewarding first experience as an Olympian.

“It’s been great,” he said. “Obviously a bit different to last time with the COVID scenario and not getting to go to events and maybe not having the same level of socializing that we had last time, but I mean to get to represent your country at the pinnacle, at the Olympics, is pretty cool and certainly something I wouldn’t want to turn down and a great honor to do. And hopefully, I get another chance to do it in the future.”