



Rome's Wesley Cupp wins inaugural New York Speedgolf Open on home course

by Kyle Mennig Aug 29, 2016 Oneida Dispatch

ROME >> Four hours is the widely accepted timeframe for an average golfer to play 18 holes.

If competitors took that long at Rome Country Club on Monday morning, it would have been catastrophic for their scores.

The course hosted the New York state's first speedgolf tournament on Monday morning, with Rome's own Wesley Cupp topping an eight-golfer field that included two world champions to claim the \$1,200 prize.

"I hit the ball super straight off the tee," said Cupp, the head professional at Rome Country Club. "I didn't miss a drive which, in regular golf is very vital. In speedgolf it's even more important because not only do you shoot a better score, you run in a straighter line which is faster and it's a lot less stressful than looking for your ball in a panic."

Monday's tournament started at 8:30 a.m. with each golfer carrying a small bag with only five or six clubs and going out individually in five-minute intervals. Strokes were counted the same as traditional golf but the rest of a player's score was calculated from the time it took to complete the course. The number of minutes and seconds were added to the number of strokes to accumulate the total score, with the lowest number winning. Cupp's 3-under 69 was by far the best score in the field and his time was 46:02 for a score of 115.02, over 11 points better than runner-up and two-time world champion Rob Hogan.

"The few bad shots it hit, I made great recoveries," said Cupp. "I got up and down from a bad spot on two which really set the pace for me for the day and got me going in the right direction because that could have easily been a bogey or double bogey from where I was and I saved par, made a good putt and that got me some confidence. Got me rolling."

Cupp birdied No. 8 and was 1-under at the turn, jumpstarting his back nine with a chip-in birdie on No. 10. He parred the next seven holes before giving himself a 15-foot birdie putt on No. 18. Cupp calmly sank the putt, drawing a cheer from the small crowd of spectators while raising his fist triumphantly in the air and circling the green.

Putting was where Cupp's home-course advantage helped him the most because he knew the slope of the green so well and he said the last shot was the one he really wanted.

"When you get to 18 there's this relief that 'OK, all I have to do is putt,'" he said. "I knew I was two under and 69 sounds so much cooler than 70 so I secretly wanted to make that more than the other ones. Usually, in speedgolf, you just whack it up there, two putts are great and get the heck out of town. But that one I was actually maybe a little more aggressive than a traditional speedgolf putt and it found the bottom of the hole, which was great."

The combined score and time left a big mark on Cupp's brother Josh, who volunteered at the event.

"People have shot 69 here before and people will shoot 69 again but nobody has done it in 46 minutes," he said. "That's the best round of golf I've ever seen."

Cupp has competed in the last two speedgolf world championships, placing 10th and eighth, and wanted to bring the sport to the area. The tournament was the first of its kind in the Northeast and the next event is the world championship in Chicago, prompting many of the sport's top players to participate. Hogan flew in from his home country of Ireland on Friday specifically for the event, getting two practice rounds in over the weekend.

Hogan shot an 85 in 41:09, the fastest time, and finished second with a score of 126.09.

"It's beautiful here. Nice course, nice atmosphere," he said. "This is great, a great tournament. These players are great. Wes and Lauren Cupp and all these guys, they're amazing."

Monday's tournament also provided a chance for the sport to gain some national exposure. Reese Waters, a correspondent for ESPN's SportsCenter, was on hand with

a five-camera crew to document the action. Once the professionals finished their rounds, the comedian set out to play a hole of speedgolf for himself despite never having played a hole of traditional golf. Four professionals, including Cupp and Hogan, were invited to ride alongside Waters in a cart and heckle him as he tried to reach the whole as quickly as possible.

“I think I might have been able to get 18 holes in by the time he finished one,” joked Cupp. “We tried heckling him. We had a lot of good doozies.”

Speedgolf’s exact date of origin is unknown but Speedgolf International says the sport started in the 1970s. It has begun to take off in recent years with the first world championship, covered by CBS Sports, held in 2012 and many of the sport’s elite players - including Cupp - hope it continues to grow.

“I always say it turns golf, which is a good game, into a great sport.”