

## **Lewis Wins 2011 U.S. Mid-Amateur**

*54-year-old becomes oldest champion in the event's 31-year history*

By David Shefter, USGA  
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RICHMOND, TX – Earlier this week at the 2011 U.S. Mid-Amateur Championship, 54-year-old Randal Lewis said he was eagerly looking forward to next year when he could start competing in senior-level events.

Turns out the Alma, Mich., resident can still play with the “young” guys.

And he'll continue to enjoy that privilege at the Mid-Amateur through 2021 after defeating Kenny Cook, 31, of Noblesville, Ind., 3 and 2, on Thursday at Shadow Hawk Golf Club in the 36-hole final of the 31st Mid-Amateur, the USGA's national championship for golfers 25 and older.

Lewis, a financial advisor who played professionally for four weeks on a Florida mini-tour after graduating from Central Michigan in 1980, also became the oldest Mid-Amateur champion in the event's 31 years, surpassing George Zahringer, who was 49 when he claimed the 2002 title. Lewis outpaced the average age of the previous 30 Mid-Amateur champions (34.8) by nearly 20 years.

The victory came 15 years after Lewis lost to John “Spider” Miller in the Mid-Amateur final at Hartford Golf Club in West Hartford, Conn. That defeat to Miller, who like Cook is a Hoosier (from Bloomington), was an identical 3 and 2, but the match was contested over 18 holes. Thirty-six-hole finals at the Mid-Amateur started in 2001.

Of course the biggest prize – other than taking custody of the Robert T. Jones Jr. Memorial Trophy for one year and receiving a gold medal – was earning a likely invitation to the 2012 Masters, a perk that Augusta National Golf Club started granting with the 1989 tournament.

“I know the Masters is a dream come true,” said Lewis, “but to be a USGA champion, especially the U.S. Mid-Amateur champion, is just unbelievable.”

Lewis will also be exempt into the next two U.S. Amateurs, the next USGA Senior Amateur (he turns 55 in 2012) and will have three years of exemptions out of local U.S. Open qualifying, not to mention several other major amateur competitions that will likely be sending him invites.

Lewis admitted that the Masters invitation was on his mind 15 years ago, the night before he played Miller, and that might have altered his focus during the final. After beating medalist Mike McCaffrey and two-time defending champion Nathan Smith on Wednesday in the quarterfinals and semis, respectively, Lewis said he would have a different mindset entering the final. He wasn't going to think about Augusta or the Masters and would just go out and enjoy the moment.

“I got a decent night's sleep last night,” said Lewis, the father of two college-age boys, Christopher (22) and Nicklaus (19). “I just wanted to focus on my game and take it one shot at a time.”

Cook, an accountant for the Department of Defense, had dominated his opponents leading into the final, trailing for only one hole over his previous five matches (80 holes). But the trend ended not long after the first tee shot. Despite giving up as much as 60 yards off the tee, Lewis won the first two holes and never trailed. The match was all square for only two holes, that coming during the morning 18 when Cook birdied the par-5 14th and the two halved the par-4 15th.

Lewis overcame his lack of power by being a model of consistency, making only three bogeys and shooting the equivalent of four under par over the 34 holes, with the usual match-play concessions.

“With the technology of today ... at least I can still get the ball out there,” said Lewis, who wasn’t bothered by Cook’s length. “I just hoped that I hit it good enough and made enough birdies to keep it close.”

Lewis was 2 up at the lunch break after posting winning pars at holes 16 and 18. At the par-5 18th hole, Cook, who played professionally for seven months after graduating from Ball State in 2003, found the water twice – the first time with a 6-iron in his hand from 201 yards – and eventually conceded Lewis’ par.

“I was definitely furious walking off 18,” said Cook, “just because I didn’t give myself an opportunity there. I kind of gave it to him.”

Cook came out strong for the afternoon 18. He reached the par-5 first hole in two with a mid-iron and two-putted for a birdie. But Lewis also reached in two with a hybrid and two-putted to halve the hole. Cook did cut the deficit to 1 down when he drove the 342-yard, par-4 second hole and two-putted for a birdie.

Lewis, however, never let Cook gain any sustained momentum.

“Today, I just rolled it terrible,” said Cook of his putting. “The speed just wasn’t there. I had a difficult time even reading the greens.... But it was a good week. I had a lot of positives.”

Lewis began to pull away after losing the 26th hole with a bogey, thanks to a poor approach shot. He told himself going to the 27th tee that he was not going to make any more mistakes.

He didn’t. His wedge approach to the par-5 27th hole – No. 9 on the course – stopped 8 feet above the hole. Lewis converted the birdie to go 2 up.

He went 3 up with a par on the par-3 29th hole and 4 up with a birdie on the 264-yard, par-4 31st hole. Cook got one back with a birdie at the par-5 32nd, but the two halved the next two holes with pars and the match ended on the 16th green.

“That’s as good as it gets for me,” said Lewis. “You saw my peak performance.”

As a finalist, Cook receives exemptions into next year’s U.S. Amateur and a three-year exemption to the Mid-Amateur. He also is exempt from local qualifying for the 2012 U.S. Open.

The U.S. Mid-Amateur is one of 13 championships conducted annually by the United States Golf Association, 10 of which are strictly for amateurs.

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**Richmond, Texas – Results from Thursday’s 36-hole championship match at the 2011 U.S. Mid-Amateur being conducted at 7,170-yard, par-72 Shadow Hawk Golf Club.**

Randal Lewis, Alma, Mich. (148) def. Kenny Cook, Noblesville, Ind. (142), 3 and 2



**Randal Lewis**  
**2011 U.S. Mid-Amateur Champion**