

Harris Wins Bay Mills Open



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Bay Mills Open Champion: Michael Harris

By Marty Henwood

August 28, 2005 — BRIMLEY, Mich.—If drama was what you were looking for, Sunday's final round of the Canadian Tour's Bay Mills Open Players Championship provided plenty of it.

And then some.

After five runner-up finishes, Michael Harris finally snagged that elusive first win in his home state with a come-from-behind playoff victory at the Bay

Mills Open Players Championship.

In the final full-field event of the season, Harris' win translated into much more than having his name etched on the championship trophy. With the \$32,000 payday, Harris leapt from fourth into top spot on the money list with \$77,622, earning an automatic exemption into the second stage of PGA Tour Qualifying School. Harris will also be one of six Tour players in the Bell Canadian Open next month in Vancouver.

Harris carded a final-round 6-under 66, one shot

better than Hultman, with both players winding up with a four-day total of 13-under 275. Californian Peter Tomasulo, a virtual lock for Rookie of the Year honours, was third at minus-9.

Canadians Stuart Anderson, Matt McQuillan and Chris Baryla tied for ninth at 4-under 284.

Despite his strong showing Sunday, Tomasulo ended up losing a lot more than he gained. Harris' triumph bumped Tomasulo into third on the money list, meaning the 23-year-old standout will have to roll the dice in the first stage of PGA Tour Qualifying while Harris and Jaime Gomez (\$74,920) get the free pass.

"The exemption is great, but the win means so much more to me right now," admitted Harris. "I've had to answer those questions (of finishing runner-up) for the past two years. Now I can put that behind me. This is pretty special."

This day certainly wasn't for the faint of heart.

For the first half of Sunday's round, it looked to be a safe bet that Harris was destined to be the proverbial bridesmaid once again. Hultman birdied his final three holes of the front side to lead by three at the turn, leaving Harris with plenty of work to do on the inbound nine.

It was then that Harris began spinning a little Sunday afternoon magic.

It all began when the former University of Michigan star chipped in for birdie on the par-4 11th to get within two. Harris narrowed the deficit to one stroke when, after leaving his tee short on the par-3 13th, he once again pitched in from the heavy rough. On the next hole, Harris pulled even by sneaking a birdie putt in the side hole.

But the fun was just beginning.

Tied for the lead on 16, Harris misread what was essentially a tap-in par putt, opening the door for Hultman to take a one-shot edge with two holes to play. Leaving himself short in the rough on the par-5 17th, Harris defied the odds once again, pitching in for the third time in eight holes. This time, he clanked his attempt off the flagstick before watching to drop in the hole for an eagle-3.

Seconds later, Hultman drained a birdie putt to square things up again.

On the par-4 finishing hole, Hultman hit his approach to within twelve feet. Harris did one better, tape-measuring a wedge from 104 yards to within six inches. Hultman answered the bell once again, converting the birdie attempt to force a playoff.

On the first extra hole, Hultman left his 16-foot birdie attempt on the lip before Harris jarred his 10-footer for the win.

"Unreal," said Harris shortly after he collected his first championship trophy on the 18th green. "They say luck isn't a part of this game, but I proved otherwise today. Anders played fantastic. Anytime you are leading and shoot 67, you should win the golf tournament. It's a crazy game for us lucky ones that have chosen this to make a living."

"I call it divine intervention," he added with a laugh.

For Hultman, who, ironically, defeated Harris to win his first Tour start in Texas two years ago, the loss was a tough pill to swallow.

"I don't know, man," said a subdued Hultman. "I played better than I did any of the other days. What can you do? It thought it was just going to be my day. It's so disappointing. It certainly didn't end the way I wanted."

With so many heartbreaks in the past two seasons, Harris was asked if his mental mistake on the tap-in putt with three holes to go was, perhaps, a sign of things to come.

"Sure, that putt could have cost me, but the four-footer that I may have missed on Thursday could have cost me as well. It never really bothered me. You know that you are going to get a chance over those final few holes. You just have to wait for it."

As fierce a competitor as you will find, Harris decided to take a more relaxed approach to the game in the past year. Instead of playing not to lose the tournament, Harris stressed he now plays it one day at a time before adding up his score at the end of the week.

"I've tried to put golf in its proper place," added Harris. "I've played a lot of tournaments worried about losing. I try not to let things get to me now. You learn where golf is in the list of priorities." **MG**

Video: <http://baymillsopen/video05.html>