

## Excellent Els a worthy Open winner

[Neil Johnston](#) reviews a thrilling climax to the Open Championship, after Ernie Els produced a superb display to claim the Claret Jug

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After a thrilling four days, perhaps it was unsurprising that this year's Open Championship was decided on the 18th green. For Ernie Els a clutch putt suddenly made winning a possibility, before a painful miss for Adam Scott soon made that a reality for the South African.

While it is easy to feel for Scott, who only four holes before was fist pumping after snaking a 20 foot birdie putt, the excellence of Els should not be overlooked.

On the first three days the course had allowed the players to shoot low, with Brandt Snedeker even managing to avoid all 206 bunkers over the first two rounds, but on a breezy Sunday, Lytham began to show its teeth.

The weather had been gentle to golf's elite in the previous rounds, but the final day brought a true test of Links Golf. With a serious prevailing wind sweeping across the course for the first time since the players teed off on Thursday, bogeys seemed more common than pars on some parts of the course.

Only nine players broke par yesterday and Ernie Els was one of them. Starting six shots off the pace he seemed an unlikely winner at the start of the day.

A nervy start from Scott, who started with a bogey, then recovered with a birdie, before dropping a shot again allowed several players back into contention. However the chasing pack failed to capitalise, and as Scott dropped shots the rest of the field seemed to follow.

With Woods losing three shots on the sixth after being too aggressive out a deadly Lytham bunker, that would later also penalise Graeme McDowell, Els suddenly appeared as the nearest threat to Scott. An uncharacteristic snap hook into the trees on 11 by McDowell confirmed this.

Woods threatened with moments of brilliance with a chip in for four at the par 5 seventh, and textbook birdies at the tenth and twelfth but a lack of trust in his driver prevented him from scoring lower. It was unsurprising though that despite not playing his best this week, the 14 time major champion still ended in style as he holed a birdie putt with the last roll of the ball on the 18th.

After several missed birdie putts on the front nine Els had gone out in two-over par, but the South African remained focused and the back nine was a whole different story. Birdies on the 10th, 12th, 14th brought him into second place, putting more pressure on the Australian leader. The 'Big Easy' then navigated his way past the next three holes in par before making a birdie on 18 that would later win him The Open.

With Scott leading by four shots with four to play, one could have forgiven the engraver if he had already begun inscribing his the Australian's name on the Claret Jug. In a final round collapse that is already being compared to Van de Velde in 1999 and McIlroy's Masters despair in 2011, bogeys at 15, 16 and 17 left the Australian level with Els on the 18th tee.

As if it couldn't get any worse for the 32 year old, his tee shot found the bunker, meaning he would have to chip out and get up and down for victory. To his credit Scott played a tremendous shot in close under the pressure and a chance of playoff beckoned. It was not to be however as he pulled the putt left of the hole for Els to gain a second Open title.

The late drama on Sunday afternoon was just the climax of a tournament where so many players had been in contention throughout the four days and although Adam Scott will be ruing those final four holes, Lytham and St Annes certainly provided a great four days entertainment.



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