



Webb's brilliance

Soaking rain in the lead up to the 2010 ANZ Ladies Masters threatened to shorten the 72-hole event. But the wet conditions had little effect on Australia's Karrie Webb who produced a stirring seventh win at Royal Pines Resort.

Story by BRUCE YOUNG. Images ANTHONY POWTER

Karrie Webb has performed some amazing feats at the event that has all but become her own; the ANZ Ladies Masters at the Gold Coast's Royal Pines Resort. But it might just be that what she achieved on the final day of this year's event tops them all.

Webb won by a massive six shots over Korea's Bo Mee Lee and the defending champion Katherine Hull, but it was the emphatic manner of her victory that would confirm that the 35 year old and Australia's iconic women's golfing event are joined at the hip.

Webb was forced to produce some of her best ever golf to extinguish a strong challenge from Hull and Lee during her stunning final round of 61 but once she had done that she took time out to smell the flowers over the closing holes. Webb still had the audacity, however, to hole a 25 foot putt at the 72nd hole to further emphasise her domination of what had been a memorable final day.

Even allowing for the advantage a lift-clean-and-place-rule had provided throughout the week, nothing can be taken away from the quality of Webb's golf, especially over the weekend where rounds of 64 and 61 would eventually see her split apart what had been a congested field.

It was Webb's 7th win in her last thirteen visits to Royal Pines and considering she has often beaten many of the world's best in doing so, it is tournament domination unequalled in women's professional golf.

The tournament appeared to be under serious jeopardy early in the week after a deluge of rain had soaked the Gold Coast in the two weeks prior. The combination of that rain and a high tide which caused surface water on several areas of the golf course left tournament organisers with no option but to cancel the Wednesday pro-am. There appeared little hope at that point that the event would be played over its scheduled 72 holes.

secures number 7

Wednesday, however, provided the opportunity for most to at least get a feel for the golf course in limited practice and by Thursday things had improved so much that play got under way on time. The only real indication of what had gone before was a lift-clean-and-place-rule for some of the soggy patches in the high traffic areas of the golf course, but other than that it was business as usual.

Day one was highlighted by an opening round of 66 by the much vaunted 2008 US Amateur Champion Amanda Blumenherst. A graduate of Duke University, Blumenherst played the first few events of her professional career on the 2009 Futures Tour but did finish 5th when playing at the LPGA's CVS Pharmacy event on invite. She served further notice of her readiness for an LPGA Tour career by winning both the first and final Stage of LPGA Tour Qualifying.

"The course was very wet today and it was extremely windy but I like it as the tougher the conditions the more it separates the players," said Blumenherst after her opening round. She would get her chance to prove her theory or otherwise over the following 54 holes.

Blumenherst was one ahead of Hull whose confidence at Royal Pines continued to grow. "I have some good memories and good vibes," said the Sunshine Coast's favourite golfing export. "I am even starting to remember which way the greens break without referring to my yardage book and, even with my approaches, knowing which way the grain runs helps as I can actually be a little more aggressive with some shots knowing the grain is going to slow it up faster."

Webb was only one further back and was quick to remind us all that despite not being totally happy with her game this was one of her better opening rounds in recent years. "This is one of my better starts in probably five or six years," said Webb referring to her round of 68. "I felt like I played the first nine holes solidly

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but then I did not drive the ball well on the back nine. Shooting two under on the back was quite a feat the way I hit it." Perhaps an ominous warning for those who might have felt she was not at her best.

While the leading few players had been impressive, much of the talk early in the day concerned last year's runner up Tamie Durdin who raced to the turn in an amazing 28 shots and at that point had opened up a four shot lead. Durdin, who in 2009 won her first event on the Japan Ladies Golf Tour and regained her playing rights to the LPGA Tour, got the speed wobbles over the closing stages, completing a back nine of 41 for a round of 69. It was a case of what might have been for the South Australian.

Round two and the weather remained kind despite the occasional squally shower and the threat of worse. At least play continued and the likelihood of all 72 holes being completed was increasing.

Blumenherst could only produce a round of 70 on day two but it was enough for her to retain at least a share of the lead with Korean Ja Ni Lim.

Lim was one of many highly accredited if unrecognised Koreans in the field. In 2009 she finished 8th on the KLPGA Tour's money list and won her second career event in what is perhaps the greatest nursery for golfing talent in the female game.



Bo Mee Lee



Amanda Blumenherst



Tamie Durdin



Ja Ni Lim



Hee Kyung Seo

Webb, Hull, Durdin and two more Koreans, Hee Kyung Seo and Seo Yeon Ryu were two shots further back. Seo and Ryu had finished as the number one and two players respectively on the 2009 KLPGA Tour money list. Ryu had also shared second place in this event twelve months earlier and so both were genuine chances to go on with their good starts over the weekend.

Durdin who had stumbled so badly on day one was able to reflect positively on that after her second round of 68. "I thought a lot about it (the demise of day one) last night," she said. "I spoke to my sports psychologist and today was all about hitting the shot that was in front of me."

Day three and with twenty players within three shots of the lead someone needed to make a statement early. Blumenherst would take up that challenge with two early birdies but before long she was under siege from all angles.

It would be Webb who finished the best on day three however. Four birdies in her final six holes gave her a round of 64 and a narrow one shot lead over Hull and Bo Mee Lee. Lee, a winner on the Korean LPGA Tour in 2009 and 5th on their money list that season, had joined the fray when she produced an impressive round of 63.

Webb's superb final hole birdie from the fairway bunker gave further evidence of the quality of her play in round three but she was surprised that her efforts had not resulted in a greater margin heading into Sunday. "I thought when shooting 64 I might have had a two or three shot lead but the scoring has been very low," she said.

Webb had made a slight swing change late in her round on Friday and it seemed to make a significant difference in round three. "On my last hole yesterday (Friday) I put the two best swings of the day on it after shortening my swing up a little. I wasn't sure if it was just a quick fix or whether it was going to work longer term but I hit balls on the range this morning and it felt good there and today I really felt like I was hitting the shots that I was seeing beforehand and wanted to hit."

Webb knew her job was not yet complete however. "This course is set up in such a way that anyone could shoot 63 tomorrow." How right she would prove to be.

Hull too had made some adjustments overnight although hers would be attitudinal. "I got a little too tense on the golf course yesterday and last night I sat down with my caddy Vern and my coach Steve and both told me to be a little easier on myself today which I was. I'm going to go out there tomorrow and give it everything I've got."

Day four was overcast but warm and again conditions were perfect for low scoring. Webb appeared to establish a lock on the event when she birdied three of her first four holes to open up a two shot lead. Hull had fallen off the pace briefly with a comparatively slow start but she bounced back when she pitched in for birdie at the 5th and then holed from 15 feet for another at the 6th and was within one of the lead.

Webb was about to deliver a massive blow to her rivals however. At the 7th her tee shot finished just in the left side of the fairway and from a downhill lie and from 113 metres, her 9 iron flew straight and true and rocketed into the cup for an eagle. Her lead

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was three and although she continued to be challenged over the next few holes it was, to a large extent, the straw that broke the back of the chasers.

Hull was not about to lie down however and later Webb would perhaps best articulate the battle she was having. “I stood on the 13th fairway and thought to myself that who would have thought starting the day I would be eight under through twelve holes and still only two shots ahead.”

Webb finally extinguished Hull’s brave challenge when she birdied the 14th from long range and then two putted from behind the green at the 15th for another birdie to move four ahead. By then it was all over and with the luxury of a five shot lead, she played the last few holes enjoying the moment.

A round of 59 had become a possibility when she birdied the 15th but it all became too much for the champion to consider at that point. “I stood on the 16th tee trying to work out how many under I was. I thought it was ten under and after creating a good birdie chance there I briefly thought if I could birdie the last three I could shoot 59 but then realised I was too tired to even think about that.”

A 25 foot putt at the last put the icing on the cake of a six shot victory and her 7th ANZ Ladies Masters title. The round of 61 will not be recognised as a course record due to the lift-clean-and-place rules that were in effect all week but it equalled Webb’s previous best ever round of 61 at the 2000 LPGA Tour’s Oldsmobile Classic.

How did this win rate compare to the previous six? “It is hard to separate them all out and pick the best one but I do know it has been great to just win seven,” said the winner. “It’s hard to

believe really. I would just like to wrap this course up and take it with me.”

Bo Mee Lee and Katherine Hull finished joint second while Hee Kyung Seo recorded a final round of 66 to finish 4th, one shot behind Hull and Lee, with a further four shots back to the next best players. The leading four players were a collective 29 under par on the final day.

Hull perhaps best summed up what had just happened. “Karrie just played absolutely flawless golf, you can never rule out a Hall of Famer. It was just an absolute clinic on Karrie’s part.”



Seo Yeon Ryu