

## Rahm gets into the mix in Qatar Open

Christopher Rahm, the defending Emirates Golf Federation Order of Merit champion, conjured up a magical finish at Doha Golf Club to get to within two shots of the leader after the penultimate round of Qatar Open Amateur Friday.



Rahm, who will turn 19 next month, was even par for his round after 14 holes when he suddenly caught fire at the **Peter Harradine**-designed golf course.

The Dubai-based Swede, winner of four EGF Order of Merit events last season, birdied the par-4 15th, then eagled the short par-4 16th, parred the par-3 17th and made another eagle on the par-5 18th for a grandstand finish. He was thus five-under par for his last four holes, and five-under par for the round.

That improved him to third place at two-under par total, two shots behind leader Pierre Verlaar Jr of Netherlands, who shot a second consecutive round of two-under par 70

Verlaar was denied glory last year by another Dubai-based golfer, Rayhan Thomas, who is again in the mix this year as he looks to secure a place in the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters by winning the tournament. The 18-year-old Indian, ranked 106th in the world after his brilliant 2016 season, added a one-under par 71 to move to fourth place at even-par 144.

Speaking to Sport360, Rahm said: "It was a solid round all throughout. I teed off earlier today and it was little less windy. But what really made a difference was that my iron shots were very consistent. I hit 17 greens in total, which helped me set up a lot of good chances to score.

"On the front nine, I had two three-putts, so that meant two bogeys. I holed a long one on the fifth to get back one shot and was one-over after nine holes.

"I stayed calm and kept the round going with some good tee shots and good ball-striking. I birdied the 10th to get back to even par.

"After the 14th hole, I told myself that the last four holes were playing downwind and that gave me an opportunity. I made an eight-footer for birdie on the 15th and then hit a two-iron to seven feet on the par-4 16th for an eagle. On the 18th, I had a good drive and then hit a two-iron to 12-15 feet and rolled that in as well.

"I am just trying to keep calm and stay relaxed about the final round. I just want to hit fairways, as that is the key to score well on this golf course."

Thomas, who got an invitation to play the Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship and is exempt to Omega Dubai Desert Classic because of winning the MENA Golf Tour Amateur Order of Merit, said: "I was grinding all day. I missed a lot of fairways, but recovered well to make pars and putted really well. My iron play was good today and I just need to tighten up my driver a little bit for Saturday.

"I had two birdies and an eagle (on the 16th) and three bogeys. I had a six-footer for a birdie on the 18th to finish on two-under par, but I missed that and closed with a 71. Still, I was happy to be in the red figures.

"Four shots off the lead...it's a big lead but anything can happen on this golf course. It can get really windy and things can change quickly. I am really looking forward to tomorrow and try and get into all three Desert Swing events."