

Wiratchant wins Sharjah Senior Golf Masters after a captivating final day



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Thailand's Thaworn Wiratchant won the Sharjah Senior Golf Masters after a captivating final day at the Sharjah Golf & Shooting.

Wiratchant first edged out Australia's Peter Fowler and then America's Clark Dennis in a dramatic sudden death playoff lasting four holes as the newly renamed Staysure Tour began an exciting new era in the northern emirate.

"It was really difficult out there today to get the win so I'm so pleased I managed to get over the line and secure the opening event of the Staysure Tour season," said Wiratchant.

"The pin positions were really difficult today compared to the first two days so it was a real challenge out there. I had to be patient in the play-off as we were all hitting good shots every time we played the hole so I needed to keep my focus and wait for my chance. I just knew I had to get the win."

Fowler, Wiratchant and Dennis were all locked at 12 under par at the end of regulation meaning a trip back up the 18th hole was required to find a winner. Fowler, who had looked solid all day until making his first bogey since the ninth hole of Thursday's opening round at the 17th, dropped out first after leaving his par putt short.

Two more trips down the **Peter Harradine** designed nine-hole course's closing hole saw pars apiece for Dennis and Wiratchant. It's a good job that the well-loved Sharjah course features floodlights because they were needed as the light faded with still no champion decided. The fourth playing of the 18th saw Dennis overshoot the green with his approach while Wiratchant found the centre, still some 10 feet from the hole.

Dennis undercooked his chip back onto the green with the ball coming to a stop on the fringe, while Wiratchant lagged his put to within inches and looked to all be over. There was almost one final moment of drama when Dennis almost chipped in for par, sending a gasp around the watching crowd, but it wasn't to be and last year's Order of Merit winner was left to accept the runner up spot as Wiratchant tapped home to claim the \$63,750 winner's cheque in the \$425,000 event, making it two in a row for the 51-year-old, who also won the final event of the 2017 season in Mauritius.

"I have never played under floodlights before so that was a new challenge for me," said the former Asian Tour player. "Hopefully, I can kick on from here and really concentrate on the year ahead. I'd like to thank all the sponsors and organisers behind the Sharjah Senior Golf Masters presented by Shurooq. Special thanks to the Sharjah Golf & Shooting Club Golf Course Superintendent Marty Brown and the Orient Irrigation Services team for delivering a superbly conditioned golf course for this week for all the players. I look forward to returning to Sharjah next year to defend my title. This is a great start to my season on the 2018 Staysure Tour."

The final round was given added excitement with different pins used on each nine and it was Fowler, who started the day two behind Wiratchant and Dennis, who looked to have the momentum, playing the front nine in 33 blows after a birdie at the second and an eagle on the sixth - his third in as many days at the par five hole which was also played as the 15th.

Dennis had turbulent front nine of 36 with consecutive birdies on the third and fourth holes giving way to bogeys on five and seven. Wiratchant picked up a shot on the fourth and gave it away again on the ninth, meaning Fowler started the second nine with a one-stroke lead.

Dennis then dropped a further shot with a bogey at the 10th and when Fowler birdied the 13th he was three in front of the American and two ahead of the Thai. But a fascinating final four holes saw the pendulum swing back level with Dennis picking up shots on 15 and 18, Wiratchant making a gain on 15 while Fowler dropped his first shot of the day on 17 meaning the spectators at Sharjah Golf & Shooting Club, and the millions watching around the world, were treated to a truly dramatic conclusion to the first Staysure Tour event of 2018.

Marwan bin Jassim Al Sarkal, CEO of the Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq), said: "The Sharjah Senior Golf Masters has become a symbolic sports event which is increasingly attracting some of the most prominent players from international golf. Adding to the emirate's historic rank for being one of the focal destinations in MENA in the global sport of cricket, we celebrate the first Staysure Tour event of 2018 for strengthening Sharjah's position as one of the top tier global destinations for the sport of golf, and for global golfers."

South Africa's James Kingston finished fourth at eight under while Scotland's Gary Orr and Argentina's Mauricio Molina finished tied fifth two shots further back.