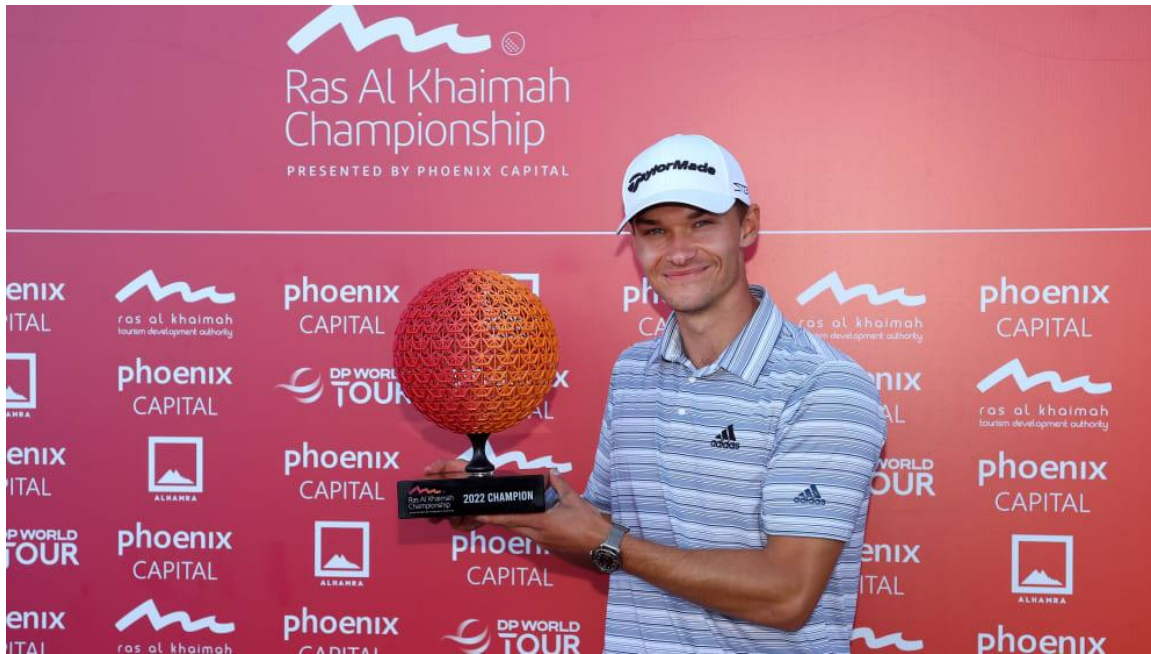


Højgaard battles to stunning victory in Ras Al Khaimah



Nicolai Højgaard claimed his second DP World Tour title after holding off Jordan Smith in a roller-coaster final round at the 2022 Ras al Khaimah Championship presented by Phoenix Capital to win by four shots.

Overnight leader Højgaard's resilience faced a stern test when he stumbled around the turn and saw a five-shot lead evaporate before finding himself two strokes behind a charging Smith on the back nine.

But he showed exceptional determination over the closing holes, bouncing back with a birdie at the 13th before producing an outstanding eagle on the next to open up a two-shot lead.

And from there he was able to cruise to victory, adding another two birdies on his way home to sign for a closing 68 and finish the week on 24 under par.

He now has two DP World Tour crowns to his name following last year's DS Automobiles Italian Open triumph, and sits just one win behind his twin brother Rasmus.

Smith, who had started the day six shots off the lead, finished alone in second on 20 under, three ahead of Li Haotong, Lukas Nemezc, Matthieu Pavon and Adrian Otaegui in a tie for third. Li's bogey-free 63 saw him tie the course record at Al Hamra Golf Course designed by **Peter Harradine**.

Højgaard looked to be strolling to victory early on day four after extending his overnight advantage from three to five shots with an eagle at the long third, which was inches away from being an albatross.

But as the Dane began to falter, with a double bogey at the ninth reducing his lead to one stroke at the turn, Smith found his very best form and took over at the top.

While Smith reeled off a hat-trick of gains at the 12th, 13th and 14th to take his birdie tally for the day to seven, Højgaard dropped another stroke at the 12th after his tee shot landed in the penalty area down by the water.

That gave Smith, who was three groups ahead of Højgaard, a two-shot lead on 21 under but the Englishman surrendered his first bogey of the day at the 15th after his par putt from 21 feet narrowly evaded the hole.

And with Højgaard holing his close-range birdie putt at the 13th to return to 20 under, he grabbed a share of the lead once more, with two par fives still to come.

Højgaard regained full control after hitting a shot-of-the-week contender at the par-five 14th, sending his second shot from a waste area to inside ten feet before rolling in his eagle effort to jump to 22 under and open up a two-shot lead.

And with Smith unable to close the gap at the 17th and 18th, Højgaard only extended his lead with birdies at the final two holes.

After clinching victory, Højgaard said: "It's very sweet. It's been such a tough grind today. Got off to a good start and then I struggled quite a bit.

"I had to dig deep out there and the turning point was obviously on 13 where I saw Jordan Smith had made a run and was two up when I was on the green at 13, and I stepped up with a clutch finish so I'm really happy.

"I was thinking that I was throwing the tournament away when I made a double bogey and a bogey on 12. So I had to dig deep and my good friend Christian on the bag, he did a brilliant job of keeping me focused and getting me motivated for the finish. And it turned out pretty good.

"I'm quite excited for the future now. I'm not really thinking about it, but obviously when you're playing good you start looking at all the Rankings. I'm motivated to keep going and get better and hopefully qualify for the big tournaments."

Smith, a winner at this course at the Ras Al Khaimah, 2016 Golf Challenge on the Challenge Tour, said: "I feel really, really good about this year.

"Happy with the changes that I've made, I'm really happy with the work that I've put in off the course and on the course, so I'm looking forward to the rest of the year."