



Englishman Peter Baker marked his first appearance in the Mauritius Golf Open by staging a tremendous recovery in the final round to lift the title.

Former Ryder Cup player Baker started the last day level with Welshman Jamie Donaldson on six-under-par, one stroke behind overnight leader Portugal's Jose -Filipe Lima.

But by the sixth hole, that deficit had been extended to four shots and Baker was looking out of contention.

However, as Lima and Donaldson began to falter, 40-year-old Baker sparked into form and when his rivals lost balls on the par-five 13th, the Englishman, who was 2006 Ryder Cup captain Ian Woosnam's right-hand man, took a decisive lead with a splendid eagle.

So, for the second year in succession, the Mauritius Open has produced a winner who has had to come from some way behind and both the organisers and the main sponsors Air Mauritius must have been pleased with the way the tournament has captured the imagination of players and spectators alike.

However, after the opening two holes of the closing round, a different story seemed to be developing.

Lima, runner-up to Miles Tunnicliff two years ago, made an explosive start, his precision play being rewarded with birdies at the first two holes while Baker and Donaldson could manage only pars.

Baker slipped further back at the next when he three-putted for bogey but then it was Lima's turn to suffer at the tough fourth hole when he sent his tee shot high and wide into the water on the right.

His next shot found the right-hand greenside bunker but a wonderful sand shot across the green and a solid putt rescued par.

However, Donaldson and Baker both made birdies, Donaldson after an exquisite 60-foot chip from just off the back of the green to within six inches for a tap-in.

Another wayward drive from Lima at the fifth saw his ball land on the eighth tee, much to the amusement of Gery Watine, Martin Gray and Gary Evans, who were about to tee off.

The Portuguese man missed the green with his recovery but chipped to within two feet, only to miss the putt. Bogey.

Baker, meanwhile, had sent his approach through the green and arrived to find his ball had gone beyond the grass and had become lodged right up against the edging. It was



a nigh impossible shot and Baker did well to find the heart of the green but he missed the par putt.

No such problems for Donaldson, who calmly rolled in a 30 -foot putt for his second birdie to draw alongside Lima at the head of the leaderboard.

The Welshman made it three birdies in a row at the sixth, a feat that was matched by Lima but Baker made a miserable attempt at birdie, with a downhill putt that was both wide and woefully short.

His putt caught the lip but the ball failed to drop and he had to settle for par.

So Lima and Donaldson moved on to the seventh tee level on nine under par, with Baker four shots behind.

The momentum immediately changed direction again at the par -three seventh when Baker hit the green while his playing partners didn't. Neither Donaldson nor Lima could get close with their chips and each missed their par putt.

Not so Baker, who made par to launch his comeback.

The news from the earlier starters suggested that the title rested with the final group and it was Baker who grabbed the initiative.

A birdie three at eight was matched by Lima while Donaldson made par. Another birdie three for Baker followed at nine, where Lima made par and Donaldson a bogey.

So, at halfway, it was Lima on nine under and Donaldson and Baker on seven under.

This changed decisively at the 10th, where Baker and Donaldson cut the corner to shorten their approaches and Lima hit a straight tee shot.

A short approach from Lima, followed by a chip and two putts saw one stroke clipped off his lead.

Donaldson chipped down from beyond the back of the green and managed to sink the putt for par but Baker sent his 12-foot putt into the hole for a third birdie in a row and suddenly he was level with leader Lima on eight under.

A splendid curling putt across the slope of the green at 11 earned Donaldson a birdie that his two rivals could only match with pars, so now, on the tricky 12th tee, there was a three-way tie in first place on eight under par.

All three men played irons off the tee but no one got particularly close with their approaches.

Donaldson and Lima failed to threaten the hole, leaving themselves a couple of feet each to gain par, which they did.



Baker, however, seemed to have picked another birdie but somehow the 15-foot putt failed to break down the slope and stayed above ground for an easy tap-in.

Still the trio could not be separated but that situation was not to last long as fortunes changed dramatically at the 13th.

Donaldson was first to tee off and a powerful strike swung violently right and disappeared into the dense wooded area.

Baker went next and found the middle of the fairway, followed by Lima, who drove longer but up against the fringe of the fairway on the right.

Donaldson played a second ball off the tee, effectively his third shot and crept past Baker's drive.

The Englishman found the green with his second shot and Donaldson did likewise with his second ball.

Lima, however, could not follow suit, pulling his approach wildly into the woods on the left, so he, too, had to play another ball and this time managed to hit the green.

He had now played four, as had Donaldson, while Baker was sitting pretty in two.

Donaldson putted short for par but sunk his next putt.

Sensing the importance of the moment, Baker rolled an exquisite putt down the hill and into the centre of hole for eagle.

Lima had a putt for par but missed, leaving himself an 18-inch tap-in for bogey. But he missed that, too, and in the space of one hole, Baker had taken a three-stroke lead.

It was an advantage that was never going to be threatened as all Baker's experience came into play.

Neither Lima nor Donaldson could make any impression as Baker made par after par on the run-in.

Donaldson's challenge faded with two bogeys in the final six holes.

Lima flattered briefly, with affine birdie at 14 and another at the last, but a three-putt for bogey from 60 feet on the par-three 17th saw his final hope of a late challenge disappear.

Baker was not to be denied. A three-iron off the 18th tee and a seven-iron second shot took him within comfortable range of the green and although Lima made the putting surface in two and two-putted for birdie, Baker chipped calmly into the centre of the green and ran his putt just beyond the hole for a three-footer for the championship.



“That’s a great way to finish the year,” said the Wolverhampton man who won back his European Tour card this season.

“I didn’t start too well. My tee shots weren’t great and I didn’t do what I wanted to do, which was to hit the fairways and give myself a few chances on the green.

“Even when I fell four behind Jose-Filipe, I didn’t think I was out of it.

“There was still a long way to go and I knew I had to be patient. It wasn’t at all easy out there and there was a chance that the others might make a few mistakes.”

Baker agreed that the 13th was the turning point.

“I was confident that if I played par golf from that point on it would be enough and that’s the way it turned out.”

Now Baker is looking forward to returning next year to defend his title:

“This is a great place. I’ve got my family out here and we’ve had a wonderful time. I’m definitely keen to come back to try to win the trophy again next year.”

Leading scores (GB & Ire unless stated): 206 P Baker 67 71 68; 209 J -F Lima (Por) 69 68 72; 211 J Donaldson 71 67 73, S Wakefield 69 71 71; 212 P Price 67 72 73; 213 P Golding 69 72 72, J Theunis (Bel) 71 72 70; 214 S Webster 73 71 70; 216 J-F Lucquin (Fr) 71 69 76; 217 F Schoettel (Fr) 71 73 73, V Phillips 77 68 72; 218 G Watine 69 75 74, M Gray 70 74 74, Ben Mason 74 73 71; 219 R Chapman 74 71 74, V Seeneevassen (Mau) 75 71 73, W Longmuir 70 77 72, D O ’Sullivan 77 72 70.