



Englishman Peter Baker became the 2007 Mauritius Open Golf champion after staging a remarkable recovery in the final round to overcome a four -stroke deficit.

The Mauritius Open has gained a reputation for producing the unexpected in recent years and the 14th edition of the tournament maintained this trend.

For when the final group of leader Jose-Filipe Lima, of Portugal, Welshman Jamie Donaldson and former Ryder Cup player Baker arrived at the fourth tee, the Englishman had slipped to four shots in arrears of Lima, who looked unstoppable after making birdies at the first two holes.

But mistakes at critical times by Lima and inconsistency by Donaldson allowed Baker to first erase the deficit and then storm into a lead he was never going to surrender.

The field looked to be one of the most competitive for a number of years.

Baker arrived in Mauritius as one of three players who had won back their PGA European Tour cards a month or so earlier. The others were Donaldson and Phil Golding, a previous winner of the Mauritius Open. Defending champion Van Phillips, who completed the back nine in just 29 strokes when winning the title, was back to defend his crown while another Ryder Cup veteran, Welshman Phil Price, returned on a mission to erase the memory of his four -putt finale to the 2006 tournament that cost him the title.

And then there was Lima, always a lively contender and the runner -up in 2005 when he gave eventual winner Miles Tunnicliff an awful fright on the final hole.

But it was unfancied Frenchman Marc Pendaries who featured among the pacesetters after the first round on the Belle Mare Plage Legend course, as he, Price and Baker posted five-under-par 67s to head the leaderboard.

Another Frenchman, Gery Watine, was also up there, sharing fourth place, two strokes off the lead with Golding, Lima and England's Simon Wakefield.

Two of Watine's rivals for the Senior Tour players' prize, Scots Bill Longmuir and Martin Gray, together with Gary Evans, were a shot further back on 70, while Donaldson was in a group of four players on one-under-par 71.

So all the big names were there, bar one. Van Phillips had a tortuous time with his driver and it cost him dearly as he carded a 77 to finish the opening day 10 strokes off the lead and virtually out of contention.

Only a second round performance similar to or better than that of 2006, when he went round in 64 would rescue his title defence. But the signs were not good.



The second day was much like the first as far as the weather was concerned. The sun was out and the heat was rising but it was accompanied by another blustery and sometimes unpredictable wind.

It didn't seem to affect Jamie Donaldson too much, though, because he shot seven birdies in the best round of the day, a performance that was marred only by a double-bogey at the fourth where he found a water hazard twice, first to the right off the tee and then when he carved his dropped ball across the fairway to the other side.

Nevertheless, he had ensured that he would be right in the mix on the final day.

Lima also improved, scoring a four-under-par 68 that put him in pole position going into the final round.

Baker fared less well than in the opening round. His 71 saw Donaldson move alongside him, a stroke behind Lima, with Price, following a level-par 72, a shot further in arrears.

The third of the leading trio overnight, Pendaries, disappeared from the radar altogether, an 83 seeing him slip back among the also-rans.

Simon Wakefield, of England, and France's Jean-Francoise Lucquin were not out of it, though, the pair finishing alongside each other on 140, three behind Lima, after Wakefield's 71 and a fine 69 from Lucquin.

And champion Phillips moved up the field with a four-under 68 but the xx-year-old was far from happy.

"I don't know how I did that," he said. "My game is terrible. I'm really struggling."

In the Seniors Tour event, Watine was not the player of the previous day and although his 75 for level-par 144 was respectable, it allowed Gray to join him as joint leader, three strokes ahead of Bill Longmuir and Kevin Spurgeon.

The final group had matters very much between themselves on the last day, although France's Freddy Schoettel momentarily stole the limelight when, as the leaders waited on the tee to get their final round under way, word came through that Schoettel had holed in one at the 150-metre third hole with a six-iron.

Even so, it soon became clear that none of the earlier starters was putting together the kind of round that would threaten the three major candidates for the title.

And for a short while, it looked to be becoming a one-man show as Lima played immaculately to birdie the opening two holes and extend his advantage to three strokes.

But in golf, nothing stays the same for long and Lima's inspired form came to a sudden halt at the par-five fourth, where he drove into water.



He recovered superbly to make his par with an up-and-down from the right-hand greenside bunker, but the aura of invincibility had gone and for the first time Lima looked human and even vulnerable.

Donaldson and Baker, who had bogeyed the previous hole to go four behind Lima, both made birdies.

Lima drove wildly onto the eighth tee at the next. A bogey for him and a wonderful birdie for Donaldson meant that now there were joint leaders.

At the eight hole it was Baker's turn to make a move and he went on a sparkling run of three consecutive birdies and when Donaldson made birdie two with a difficult, curling putt at the 11th, the trio arrived on the 12th tee on level terms at eight under par and with no move coming from behind.

There was no change at 12 but at the 13th, destiny took a hand in proceedings with a sequence of events that was to determine the outcome.

Donaldson drove first and sent his tee shot high and wide to the right from where no man, woman or golf ball returns unscathed, so dense and brutal is the vegetation that flourishes there, managing somehow to gain sustenance among the mass of volcanic boulders that has accumulated there.

Baker and Lima both found the fairway, the Englishman up the middle and the Portuguese close to the right fringe. Donaldson had to re-load.

A superb strike by Baker found the green, 20 feet above the pin. Donaldson also hit the green but by now he had played four.

Then it was Lima's turn but, inexplicably, he pulled his approach to the left and it disappeared deep into the no-go area on the left. His second attempt, after a penalty drop, found the target but now he, too, had played four shots.

First to putt, Donaldson left his effort for par short but sunk his next putt.

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 over Donaldson, with an extra shot in hand of Lima.

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 a fine 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.”

Meanwhile, the contest among the European Seniors Tour players finished with Frenchman Watine and Scotland’s Gray sharing the honours on 218, a shot in front of closest rivals Longmuir and Denis O’Sullivan.

And, as is becoming almost customary, Vishnoo Seeneevassen took the prize for being the top Mauritian finisher.

Final 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.



Belgium's Lara Tadiotto successfully defended a two-stroke overnight lead to secure the Ladies' European Tour title in the Mauritius Open on the windswept Legend course at Belle Mare Plage on Sunday.

The 33-year-old Tadiotto had laid the foundations for her victory in the opening two rounds, launching her challenge with a three-over-par 75 on Friday and following up with the only level-par round of the tournament in difficult conditions on the second day.

A one-stroke lead over four players – Melodie Bourdy, defending champion Lora Fairclough, Isabella Maconi and Silvia Knauber – after the first round was extended by a further stroke in round two.

The final round on Sunday saw Fairclough close the gap on the front nine and then take a slender lead. But at the crucial 14th hole, Tadiotto sunk a 40-foot putt for birdie while Fairclough missed a six-footer for par.

After that, Tadiotto maintained her slender one-stroke advantage and when Fairclough three-putted the 16th and 17th for bogeys, the title was in her grasp.

However, a pulled drive at the final hole forced the Belgian to reload and from her second drive, Tadiotto put a three-wood approach on the green.

Fairclough had the slight advantage but a two-putt for par was answered by a two-putt for bogey by Tadiotto and the title was hers.

"I am really pleased for Lara," said a gracious Fairclough at the presentation ceremony. "She played well and deserved her victory."

Tadiotto responded by saying that she was thrilled by her success:

"I have won in Belgium but not outside the country, so this is a pleasing success for me.

"It may have been a small field but the competition was strong and to win here was important to me."

Third-placed Bourdy enjoyed a good tournament although her temperament in the final round probably cost her a chance of a higher placing, while the expected challenge from Lynn Kelly failed to materialise.

Final scores: 223 L Tadiotto (Bel); 225 L Fairclough (Eng) 76 73 76; 227 M Bourdy (Fr) 76 73 78; 229 L Kenny (Sco) 77 76 76; 231 I Maconi (It) 76 74 81; 247 C Foong (Can) 86 82 79; 252 S Knauber (Ger) 76 90 86; 254 K Fisher (Eng) 85 80 89; 257 L Wright (Eng) 80 89 88; 266 S Hunter (Eng) 87 88 91.

By Neil WEBBER