

European Senior Masters

Dukes Course, Woburn GC

England

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Mason makes history at Woburn

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Carl Mason cropped

England's Carl Mason retained the European Senior Masters at Woburn Golf Club with a brilliant birdie at the first hole of his sudden-death play-off against Italy's Costantino Rocca, to become the richest golfer in European Seniors Tour history.

After the duo had tied on a 54 hole total of six under par 210, Mason edged his tense final day battle with playing partner and title rival Rocca with his birdie, secured after a 121-yard wedge to two feet on the 18th hole being replayed.

When Rocca's own 18 feet birdie effort lipped out, Mason calmly tapped in to seal the 17th win of his Seniors Tour career. The top prize of €49,713 (£33,750) took Mason's career earnings to €1,521,836 (£1,033,321) and he surpassed the previous record holder, fellow countryman Tommy Horton, as the leading European Seniors Tour money winner of all time.

Mason said: "It is an achievement I am proud of, but I'm glad it's out of the way now, as everyone has been telling me about it and asking about it this week. It was a little bit more pressure on an already demanding week, as the defending champion, so I'm even more delighted to have won and retained my title. It was difficult."

He then humbly spoke of how overwhelmed he has been by his run of success and 17 victories in just five years competing on the circuit.

After he received his trophy from the 15th Duke of Bedford, president of Woburn Golf Club and owner of the Woburn Estate his family have held for over 400 years, and where the golf premises have been situated since 1973, Mason took time to reflect on his staggering achievements.

He said: "It's incredible. I never thought I'd win 17 times when I started out. I thank my late dad, Roy, my wife Beryl and son Andrew, for all of it."

Mason also enjoyed the added bonus of £10,000 donated by the Duke of Bedford to the leading player, and his wife Beryl said: "I don't think of how we're going to spend it!"

Mason shot a final round of one over par 73 to Rocca's level par 72 – but needed to hole a monster 35 feet birdie across the full width of the green on the 18th hole to set-up the play-off, having wobbled on the back nine and dropped three shots.

He said: "I really thought my chance had gone when I bogeyed 15, 16 and 17, but my first birdie on 18 proves that you must never give up. I have to admit I was very relieved to see it drop."

A disappointed Rocca who, with a two shot lead heading down the 18th hole, bogeyed the last after failing to get up and down from the near greenside bunker, reflected on his play-off defeat: "Sometimes you have to say you are unlucky; sometimes you have to say he was a little bit better. Today, I say both."

England's Bob Cameron was third after closing with a 68 for a five under par 211 total, while Zimbabwe's Tony Johnstone shot 69 to finish fourth on three under par 213. Scotland's Sam Torrance shot a 68 to finish one shot further back on two under par 214 in a tie for fifth place.

Commenting on being surpassed by Mason, Tommy Horton was fulsome in his praise.

Horton, a five time European Seniors Tour Order of Merit winner, and with 23 senior tournament victories to his name, has amassed €1,509,454 (£1,024,919) in his 16 years on the senior circuit since his debut in 1991.

He said: "The prize money was a lot, lot less when I started out. You used to get £7-8-9,000 for a win and now of course, it's a lot higher. But that doesn't deflect from Carl's achievement. He's playing tremendous golf – and I can retire now he's passed me at the top."

To do so, Mason had to draw on his experience around the Duke's Course, for the battle with Rocca was as tight and testing as the 6,896 par 72 course itself.

Starting the final round seven and six under par respectively, both players birdied the first hole, but Mason held a three shot lead when Rocca double bogeyed the 134 yard par three third hole after overshooting the green and leaving himself with a treacherous chip and putt.

However, a birdie at the par five fifth got Rocca back to six under, and when Mason bogeyed holes six and eight, the pair were tied, only for Mason's birdie at the ninth to take him back into the lead by one stroke.

Rocca responded to birdie the tenth to level once more, but Mason's two on the

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186 yard par three 12th hole took him back to eight under par. However, a pushed approach on the 15th found the greenside bunker, and after a heavy shot out of the sand, Mason missed his 15 feet par effort.

Then came his run of two more bogeys until his miraculous monster birdie putt on the last to rescue his title hopes.

Commenting on his best score of the tournament, Sam Torrance was a happy man after firing a four under par 68, to finish in a tie for fifth place.

The Scot reached three under par for his round through 12 holes after birdies at eight, nine and 11, but two bogeys on 14 and 15 derailed his score. However, he responded with a birdie blitz over the final three holes, firing three consecutive threes with some brilliant approaches and putting.

He said: "It tidied things up and was a great way to finish. I played really well today – and could have had a few more birdies, on the first and third especially. I'm happy I hit a low score – it sends me to Stoke by Nayland for the PGA Seniors Championship this week in good spirit. I've won it for the past two years and a third would be nice."

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