What a finish to the British Open yesterday. I'm a huge golf nerd, and when I wake up in the morning on the Sunday of a major, that is the type of finish I pray I see. It had all the elements. A great course. Most likely the two best golfers in the world yet to win a major. And the final holes were just dripping with drama. Mitch tells us all about it this morning.

There is no verifiable proof yet that Ireland almost ran out of Guinness last night as the entire nation (plus Northern Ireland) partied on into the wee hours to celebrate the first Irishman to win the prestigious Open Championship of Golf in 60 years; the affable Padraig Harrington.

In doing so, Harrington also became the first European to win the Open since Scotsman Paul Lawrie in 1999. The similarities between the two are almost eerie; a thrilling victory in a four hole playoff on the tough links course in Carnoustie, Scotland that featured a meltdown on the treacherous 18th hole. But unlike Jean Van de Velde in 1999, Harrington did not blow a three stroke lead with a triple bogey; instead surrendering a one-stroke lead after putting two shots into the infamous Barry Burn, then knocking a wedge shot to within five feet and converting a nerve-wracking putt for the six, forcing Sergio Garcia to make a par on the 499 yard par 4 for the win.

But Garcia was unable to rise to the challenge, dumping his approach shot into the bunker, and then blasting out to ten feet of the pin. His championship putt just tickled the left side of the cup, spinning out to set up the unique four hole aggregate playoff. From there Harrington took control immediately, sticking a seven iron within eight feet on the first hole of the playoff, while Garcia failed to get up and down from a

bunker, giving Harrington a two stroke lead. After matching pars the next two holes, Harrington once again was staring down the 18th fairway with a lead. This time he kept his driver in his bag and teed off with a utility club, laying up short of the burn on his second shot, playing for bogey.

Garcia gave it his best effort, smoking a six iron onto the green from 203 yards away, giving him a 25 foot putt to force sudden death. As happened all day, his putt was just an inch or two off-line, giving the title to Harrington after he converted his four foot bogey putt; sending Dublin, Ireland into mass hysteria.

For Harrington, a self described "journeyman", it was a dream come true. An hour earlier, his three year old son Patrick had ran into his arms after his devastating double-bogey on 18. This time, the run and the hug were the same, but the emotions of the father were far different. Unlike Van de Velde, who will always be remembered for his historic collapse much more than Lawrie was for the win, Padraig was able to redeem himself, and his victory over the Spaniard will go down as one of the most thrilling Open Championships ever.

It certainly didn't seem that way earlier in the weekend, as Sergio looked to be running away with it. He started out with a six-under 65 on the first day to take a two stroke lead. It was obvious that the R&A (the European equivalent of the USGA)

was determined to make Carnoustie a much fairer test of golf than was seen in 1999, when it was dubbed "Carnasty" due to the diabolical setups and rough that almost made the conditions at a U.S. Open seem tame. Many top golfers stayed close to Sergio, with two time defending champ Tiger Woods four back at two under.

The first day also saw some interesting golf in the forms of young Rory McIlroy from Northern Ireland, an eighteen year old amateur (who looks to be about fourteen) showing up on the first page of the leaderboard (he finished at five over, winning Top Amateur). There was also a John Daly sighting, with the big man leading the tournament after his first eleven holes at five under. In true Daly style, he quickly turned the lead into a train wreck, playing the final seven holes in eight over, and missing the cut.

Sergio maintained his two stroke lead on Friday, despite shooting an even par 71. Conditions were much tougher with the cold weather, sporadic rain, and tricky winds. Tiger dropped completely out of contention with a 74, and Phil Mickelson continued his Season of Lost Majors by finishing at six over, two off the cut line. Also missing the cut were normal stalwarts Colin Montgomery, Justin Leonard, Geoff Ogilvy, and Davis Love III.

This left the hot K.J. Choi as Sergio's playing partner in the final grouping on Saturday, but the South Korean was unable to rise to the challenge of competing for a major on the only links course most professionals see in tournament play each year; losing four strokes to Sergio on the day, and leaving the other spot in the final twosome to the unlikely Steve Stricker, who fired a course tournament record 64 on Saturday, to pull within three strokes of the lead to start the last day.

For the first five holes on Sunday, this looked to be a run-away. Stricker's normally reliable putter failed, while Garcia continued the steady putting he had exhibited all week after switching to a belly putter a few weeks ago. But things started falling apart for Sergio on the fifth hole, when he missed a par putt within four feet. You could feel the nerves starting to get to him, as he not only bogeyed three of four holes, but also was missing birdie putts from less than eight feet that he had been knocking down earlier in the week.

This was all that was needed for the field to catch back up. Ernie Els and Harrington made their charge, along with as unlikely suspect imagined, 27 year old Argentine Andres Romero, who made the end of the tournament look like a new ride at Cedar Point. He had ten birdies on the day, but was done in by a double-bogey on 12 after hitting into one of the dreaded gorse bushes, and then had his own Van de Velde moment when he tried to take a two iron out of the heavy rough

on 17, ricocheting his shot off the wall of the burn out of bounds for another double bogey. His bogey five on 18 dropped him to six under, which ended up being one stroke out of the playoff.

But this was Padraig's day, and he would not be denied, even by his own questionable play on the 18th. Despite the double-bogey, he still shot a 67 on Sunday, making up six shots on Garcia. While Sergio's putter once again became his worst enemy (along with his frail ego), Padraig's was his best friend, especially when he rolled in a fifteen footer for eagle on the 14th. The confidence gained throughout the round was able to sustain him, and it seemed clear that once the playoff started, he had the advantage over the shaken Sergio.

Once the final putt found the center of the cup, the 35 year old son of a Dublin policeman raised his arms, then his young son, and then an Irish flag. And a few minutes later, he was raising the Claret Jug as The Champion Golfer of 2007. It couldn't have happened to a more deserving man.