Graeme McDowell became the first European to win the U.S. Open in 40 years yesterday by managing to survive the multi-car crash that was Pebble Beach, a course that wickedly tossed aside contenders with much higher pedigrees.

The thirty year old from Northern Ireland won because he managed to hold things together on a day when the course combined with the weather to take birdies almost totally out of play, content to go for fairways and greens in regulation. The strategy served him well, as it forced other players behind him to take chances, something Pebble did not take kindly to on this Fathers Day, or any other day for that matter, as McDowell won by finishing at even par.

Even with that McDowell, the leader after 36, needed help as he entered the final pairing three strokes behind leader Dustin Johnson. The 25 year old who hits balls so far that Tiger Woods calls them "stupid long", had already won twice at Pebble Beach, and was being crowned by many in the media as the Next Champion and the Next Greatest Young Talent (see also; Rory McIlroy, Anthony Kim, Ricky Fowler, and Ryo Ishikawa). That talk ended after Johnson blew up on the second and third holes, which he played at five over par on his way to a disastrous 82 for the day.

With the field suddenly back into play, it was game on for some of the biggest names in the sport to step up and claim another piece of glory. Tiger Woods had been the name getting the most buzz on Saturday, as he fired an impressive five-under-par 66 to get back on the first page of the leaderboard. Everyone was wondering if that was a prelude to Tiger finally stepping out of the self-induced shadows of his own ribald behavior to once again claim glory with his otherworldly golf talent. But it was not meant to be, as Tiger was spraying balls all over the course as badly as he did at Quail Hollow, never coming close as he ended up in a tie for fourth place, keeping Tiger's record perfect in one regard; he has never come from behind on a Sunday to win a Major.

The challenge seemed to be coming from two groups back from the final pairing, as Phil Mickelson and Ernie Els were making their charges. Phil had roared back into contention on Friday with a magnificent 66, but then stumbled a bit on Saturday with a two-over-par 73. On Sunday, he just couldn't find his putting stroke, which cost him the tournament. Exhibit A for this was on the 331 yard par 4 fourth hole. Phil ripped off a booming drive that found the green, leaving him a 15 foot putt for eagle, and all the momentum he could want. And then he three putted for a par.

Els fared a bit better, and at one point the big South African was actually tied for the lead at two under. But the back nine also did in the Big Easy. It was great to see Ernie recapture some of the acclaim that he once held before injuries and age slowed him down, and there is certainly nothing to be ashamed of in getting yourself back into a position to contend for a major, ending up finishing third. While this may console Els a bit, and make him a formidable challenger in the British Open next month, it can't be very soothing to him right now, knowing that his inability to hit a fairway on the final day cost him a third U.S. Open title.

The only person to truly challenge McDowell ended up being someone much more obscure than Graeme. Gregory Havret, a Frenchman, had qualified for the U.S. Open in the most arduous manner; surviving a six man playoff in a regional just to get into the 36 hole qualifying event. But here he was, calmly knocking down pars while being paired up with Tiger, and all of the circus that comes with that. Havret had the opportunity to become the first person to win a major in his very first appearance since Francis Ouimet in the 1913 U.S. Open (and that one was so monumental that they made a movie out of it, "The Greatest Game Ever Played", starring Shia LaBeouf…I highly recommend it).

In the end, however, Havret couldn't pull it off, missing a 15 foot birdie putt on 18 that could

have forced a Monday 18 hole playoff.

Or maybe not. McDowell was nothing if not the smartest player on the course on Sunday. Standing back on the fairway, 230 yards from the green, he witnessed Havret missing the putt, and immediately put his 3 iron back in the bag, choosing instead to play a lay-up on the par 5, which would leave him a 100 yard wedge onto the green where he could two-putt for the championship…which is exactly how it played out.

So McDowell gets the win, and the casual fans start immediately grumbling, something that is quite unfair. McDowell is in the Top 50 in the World Rankings, so the young man definitely has the talent, which he also showed in the last Rider Cup. But since he doesn't play that often in the States, most people haven't heard of him. But rest assured, he is not going to be the U.S. Open equivalent of Todd Hamilton, the Yank who came from nowhere to win the 2004 British Open, and then immediately sank back into obscurity.

To be fair…the U.S. Open already has its own Todd Hamilton, in the form of 2005 winner Michael Campbell. Still able to play in this Open due to his win, he finished in 151st place after shooting an 83 on Friday, and is so far down on the World Rankings that John Daly might be giving him some pity.

One great thing about McDowell winning was that it once again showed the obnoxiously smug Johnny Miller to be clueless as well, as Miller spent most of the day Friday, and almost all day Saturday telling the world how McDowell wouldn't be able to withstand the pressure and would fold. But that is Miller's schtick; coming across as the grumpy old man yelling at every other player to "stay off my yard" as more and more years pass from his brief period of excellence, and time has not seen him remembered in the same light as other greats from that era.

McDowell certainly wasn't listening, and it is so fitting that he won at Pebble Beach, as it played very much like a British links course, something the Irishman is quite familiar with. While the course didn't have the famed four inch thick rough the USGA loves to include in most Opens, it did have fairways shaved down to suck balls into traps and hazards, and greens that were as fast as putting on painted concrete. Then there was the "trick hole", the diabolical par five 14th, where players not landing the ball on an area roughly equivalent to the square footage of a two car garage found their balls careening down a hill. Numerous triple bogey eights were carded on that hole, and even a nine by former Masters champion Zach Johnson.

But that was “risk/reward” golf at its finest, which is what the U.S. Open is always supposed to be about. As it turned out, most players kept forgetting that fact.

Not Graeme McDowell. “I can’t believe how difficult this course was,” he stated after the round. “No matter how good you play; good golf got rewarded, and bad golf got punished really badly.”

Dustin Johnson, Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson, and Ernie Els can attest to the latter part of that statement. Meanwhile, Irish eyes are smiling as McDowell epitomizes the former.