

Soenderby wins Women's Irish Open as Van Dam breaks driver heading for playoff after rope accident

The Dutch star's driver became snagged on the rope, snapping the shaft.



GREAT DANE: Smilla Tarning Sønderby of Denmark celebrates a birdie putt on the 16th hole. Picture: Eóin Noonan/Sportsfile

SUN, 03 SEP, 2023 - 18:09

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Anne Van Dam bizarrely broke her driver on the way to the first playoff hole and watched Denmark's Smilla Tarning Soenderby make a spectacular eagle to win her maiden LET title in an incredible finish to the KPMG Women's Irish Open at Dromoland Castle.

Nine strokes behind leader Van Dam overnight, Soenderby (23) made 11 birdies in a stunning 10-under 62 to set the target at 16-under, then waited two hours to discover she was in a playoff with the Dutch star, who shot 71, and Sweden's Lisa Pettersson, who shot 68.

Van Dam then broke her driver when heading to the 18th tee in a buggy for the playoff in one of the most bizarre incidents ever seen in televised golf.

The Dutch star, whose driver broke en route to Co Clare and left her using a three wood until a replacement arrived 30 minutes before the first round, was being driven down the middle of the 18th fairway when the decision was taken to duck under the fairway ropes.

But Lady Luck was not smiling on Van Dam, who was bidding to end a four-year drought, and her driver became snagged by the rope, snapping the shaft as the clubs were ripped off the back of the cart.

She had no possibility of getting a replacement and used a three wood to outdrive Pettersson and Soenderby, who both found the fairway.

Pettersson flew the green and couldn't get up and down for birdie, but while Van Dam hit a stunning approach to 11 feet, Soenderby drew a 178-yard six iron around the big tree in the fairway to 12 feet and rolled in the eagle putt.

Van Dam still had an eagle putt to extend the playoff, but she missed on the left, sparking scenes of jubilation from Soenderby's friends, who drenched her in champagne.

"I'm not quite sure what happened there, actually," said Soenderby, who three-putted the 72nd hole last year to miss out on another three-way playoff.

"I hit a good drive, a very long drive compared to the first time around, and then I had 178 yards. I just wanted to get it in the middle of the green. I missed it a bit left, and it sounded like almost holed it and then the putt went in.

"As I told you before, I didn't think it was enough when I got into the clubhouse, but it turned out to be enough.

"After the 18th last year, I said I'm okay to not be in the playoff because I'm not sure I'm ready to be in that position, and I'm ready for it now.

"I knew how to handle those feelings and emotions that came on that 18th fairway. I knew what to do, and I did it."

As for Van Dam's bad luck, she said: "Pretty chaotic playoff hole when I got to that tee box. I'm really sorry for what happened to Anne. Like it's super unfortunate. She did quite well anyway."

Leona Maguire was looking on after she closed with a one-under 71 to finish eight shots outside the playoff on in a tie for 14th on eight-under.

The world number 17 birdied three of her first six holes, but chasing a round like Soenderby's, she three putted the eighth for bogey and played the back nine in one over, driving into the water at last to finish with a bogey six.

"I felt like I played some really good golf," said Maguire, who believes Carton House has a tough act to follow next year when it hosts the tournament on the O'Meara Course.

"Under par all four days. Just didn't quite all fit together, but overall, it was great to have so much support all week. Great crowds every single day. This event is going from strength to strength, it's fantastic to see.

"I was wearing a lot of hats this week. I had more than one job to complete this week. It's one of those things, one of those weeks that it's a bit bigger than yourself. I tried my best. Hopefully, everybody had a great week."

Douglas' amateur Sara Byrne, the AIG Irish Close champion, made an eagle two at the 15th and three birdies in a closing 70 to finish tied for 35th on four-under on her LET debut.

Kirkistown Castle's Beth Coulter was a shot further back in joint 40th on three under after a 71, while Olivia Mehaffey slipped to 50th on one under, tied with Hermitage amateur Kate Lanigan (72) after a 75.

Elm Park amateur Emma Fleming tied for 66th on six-over after a 73.

