

Mark Roe shows Ross Fisher a short cut to the finish



Ross Fisher lines up his putt on the 6th green during the European Open

Peter Dixon

Ross Fisher had never clapped eyes on the Heritage Course at The London Club before he began the first round of the European Open on Thursday. Yet by the time he was adding the finishing touches to a crushing victory over a strong field yesterday, each hole will have been burnished deep into the Englishman's subconscious.

With the sun finally shining through in this part of Kent after a day of driving wind and rain, Fisher produced a finish fitting of a champion when he chipped in for a birdie from a bunker at the back of the green at the 72nd hole. It gave him a round of 68, to go with rounds of 63, 68 and 69, for a 20-under-par total of 268 and victory by seven strokes over Sergio García, of Spain, and eight over Graeme McDowell, of Northern Ireland. His round included an eagle, three birdies and one bogey.

Having opened with a course record, Fisher led the tournament from start to finish for his second victory on the European Tour. He won £400,000, moved to eleventh in the Europe Ryder Cup standings and proved that he has the game to challenge for the highest honours.

"For some reason I felt an immense sense of calmness inside," Fisher, a graduate of a Wentworth scholarship programme, said. "This week I must have played nigh-on perfect golf. And to win a tournament like that [with a birdie at the last] is what dreams are made of."

While Fisher will go into the Open Championship at Royal Birkdale, which starts in 11 days, with his confidence sky high, García is another to have hit top form at the right time. In testing conditions, García produced the round of the day, a six-under-par 66 with seven birdies and one bogey. The world No8's play from tee to green was sublime, but it was his putting that caught the attention.

It has been well documented how poor García's putting has been under intense pressure. Arguably, it cost him his first major championship at the Open last year at Carnoustie - where he adopted the belly putter and looked to have found the answer to his woes before he missed a six-footer on the last hole for victory - but he looks to have found the stroke to go with the rest of his game. García has been working with Stan Utley, a former PGA Tour professional and a putting specialist, in America and it seems to be paying off. In the final round yesterday the Spaniard had 21 putts and was delighted. "That's the best putting round I've ever had," he said.

It is one thing to putt well in a tour event while battling for second place. It is quite another when in contention coming down the stretch at the Open. Still, García is right to be pleased.

But it is Fisher, 27, who has effected the greatest turnaround. He collapsed dramatically at the BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth last year, where he had a share of the lead going into the final round and came in with an eye-watering 84. It was much the same at the HSBC Champions event in Shanghai last November, when he chipped into water from the side of the 72nd green and lost a sudden-death play-off to Phil Mickelson.

While both occasions left Fisher ashen-faced, he has become stronger in adversity. The key, he knows, is to

get into contention and then to learn how to cross the finishing line. His short game was letting him down so he contacted Mark Roe, the former European Tour player, for help. In very little time, Roe has added a new dimension to a prodigious and accurate long game that has many admirers. So it was no coincidence that he holed out twice from bunkers last week, his game having moved on to a new level. Now watch him go.