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Shane Lowry of Ireland celebrates with the Claret Jug on the 18th green after winning the 148th Open Championship.

Mike Ehrmann/Getty Images

Lowry Caps Superb Week For Irish Golf With Home Win

By Paul Prendergast

Sixty-eight years between drinks for Northern Ireland as an Open Championship host could barely have been celebrated with more of a ‘Cinderella Story’ finish, with Shane Lowry closing out an amazing week for Ireland with a commanding six-stroke victory in the 148th Open Championship.

With the weight of nations on his sturdy shoulders, the 32-year-old from County Offaly earned his first Major championship in emphatic style in his 10th year as a professional, 10 years removed from his breakthrough victory at the Irish Open as an amateur.

“I’m Irish, I always grew up holing putts to win The Open and I grew up with Paddy (Harrington) winning Opens,” Lowry said, “To have him there on the 18th, like you go into Paddy’s house and the Claret Jug is sitting on the kitchen table, and I’m going to have one on my kitchen table as well.”

Sealing the deal for himself and for Ireland capped off a momentous week in the stunning setting of Royal Portrush along the coastline of Northern Ireland.

Patriotic, boisterous yet highly respectful crowds greeted players on each and every day, with the mood for this historic Open set from the



Lowry with wife Wendy and daughter Iris.

Mike Ehrmann/Getty Images

very first tee shot – fittingly awarded to Portrush resident and the man credited for influencing the R&A to bring the Open back to Ireland, Darren Clarke.

The 2011 Open Champion fought through the emotion of the

enormous reception afforded to him and the other Irish players with a striped tee shot down the first. And for good measure, this modern day Pied Piper of Northern Irish golf led the Championship after his opening nine holes.



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Tommy Fleetwood was Lowry's closest rival, finishing six shots behind on 275, after a final round 74.

Graeme McDowell – Portrush born and raised – had to wipe away tears before his opening gambit and performed well, before leaking shots in the difficult final day to finish off the pace in a tie for 57th. However, it was the fate of Northern Ireland favourite Rory McIlroy that provided the story of the opening day, for less than savoury reasons for fans of the four-time Major champion.

All his golfing life, he's probably dreamt of the day an Open would return to his homeland, however, shockwaves rippled quickly across the golfing world when the rapturous welcome he received quickly turned to silence after tugging his iron tee shot out of bounds. Compounding the error by finding the left rough with his next, things went from bad to horrible when gnarly gorse to the left of the green swallowed his fourth, resulting in yet another penalty drop on his way to a calamitous quadruple bogey 8.



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Tony Finau was the highest placed American finisher, in third on 277, following his closing 71.

Understandably shaken to his core, McIlroy limped home in eight-over 79, before showing his mettle by rebounding magnificently on Friday to threaten the weekend cut.

A six-under 65 would sadly fall just one stroke shy of the mark, joining many illustrious names heading home, or down to the local for a pint, that included Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson, Adam Scott and U.S. Open champion Gary Woodland. Tapping in for a closing par, the Hollywood native was farewelled at the closing hole in a manner that left him under no illusion as to his popularity in these parts.

Lowry flew somewhat under the radar by comparison to his more illustrious countrymen, as much as any Irish golfer could in these circumstances. An opening round of 67 was matched on Friday, placing him alongside American J.B. Holmes at the top of the pile at the halfway mark.

With imminent threats in the shape of Brooks Koepka, Justin Rose, Jordan Spieth Tommy Fleetwood and Xander Schauffele looming ominously, performing well on a fine weather day on Saturday would be critical. And

to say Lowry was 'Offaly' good on Saturday, would be the understatement of the year.

The splendid vagaries of links golf were exemplified on the weekend when Lowry fired the round of his life – an eight-under 63 – to establish and blow out a lead of his own and set an Open 54-hole record low.

Controlling his ball and temperament beautifully, Lowry set up a four-stroke buffer over the field with consecutive birdies from the 15th through 17th holes, leaving a fourth on the lip on the final green when looking to match the all-time Major championship low of 62, set by Branden Grace at The Open in 2017.



Mike Ehrmann/Getty Images

Brooks Koepka, who seems to thrive in Majors, shared fourth with Westwood.



Mike Ehrmann/Getty Images

Lee Westwood finished joint fourth with Koepka on 278.



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Rickie Fowler's final round 74 saw him settle for a share of sixth, with three others, on 279.

“That’s the most incredible day I’ve ever had on the golf course,” Lowry said at the time, before topping it 24 hours later.

“Obviously, it is one of the best scores I’ve ever shot, but I think we got very lucky with the weather today. The greens are perfect and we’re playing links golf in no wind.”

However, Sunday’s wild and woolly conditions were more than a test for

the bulk of the field. Poor J.B. Holmes dropped from third place to tied 67th after a desultory 87 following three rounds in the 60s. Rose started Sunday with aspirations to put pressure on the Lowry with a fast start, but was left reeling at day’s end after posting 79 – which he later Tweeted was better than 80.

Just 15 players survived Sunday’s buffeting to finish under-par for

the tournament with 2018 Open Champion Francesco Molinari posting the day’s best score with 66. Just two players the final 12 groups were able to shoot even par.

Under the crushing weight of expectation and the trying conditions, you could argue Lowry’s final round 72 in the company of Fleetwood – who beat home American Tony Finau into second place – was even

more meritorious than the number he posted the previous day. The situation certainly brought out the best in the Irishman’s considerable talents in all conditions and for a time, has softened the pain of losing a final round lead to Dustin Johnson at the 2016 U.S. Open at Oakmont.

The final few holes in particular were highly emotional for all watching on, as all of Ireland greeted a home



Lowry celebrates his victory on the 18th green of the Dunluce Links at Royal Portrush Golf Club, with the support of a home crowd at his back.



Danny Willett was one of four golfers who shared sixth. He closed with a 73.

‘Champion Golfer of the Year’, their sixth Major champion after Fred Daly, Clarke, Harrington, McIlroy and McDowell.

“I knew I was home and hosed down 18,” Lowry said, “I let myself enjoy it and it was incredible walking down 18, they were singing and going mad. I could not believe it was happening to me.”

At the presentation ceremony, Lowry fought back tears as he thanked his parents and family.

“They sacrificed so much for me when I was younger and I’m so happy that I can hand them this trophy tonight,” Lowry said.



Patrick Reed was solo 10th on four -under 280, after a final round 71.

“My wife and my little girl, to have them here today is just extra special. I’m going to be coming back to play another 27 Opens. She’s (daughter Iris) going to be nearly 30 when I play my last one. That’s going to be nice.

“It’s just incredible to be sitting here with a trophy in front of me. Look at the names on it.”

68 years between drinks ... but no more. The party has certainly started for Lowry and for Ireland, with Lowry determined to take time off to tour the trophy to as many of his countrymen as he can.

And given the success of the week and the magnificent test of golf that

Royal Portrush provided as an Open Championship venue, there’s no chance we’ll be waiting 68 years for another. ●

Final Leaderboard

269	Shane Lowry	67-67-63-72
275	Tommy Fleetwood	68-67-66-74
277	Tony Finau	68-70-68-71
278	Brooks Koepka	68-69-67-74
278	Lee Westwood	68-67-70-73
279	Rickie Fowler	70-69-66-74
279	Tyrrell Hatton	68-71-71-69
279	Robert MacIntyre	68-72-71-68
279	Danny Willett	74-67-65-73
280	Patrick Reed	71-67-71-71