



Putt On

Clear skies and open fields welcomed international golfing greats to the **UBS Hong Kong Open** Championship 2012, backed by the Mega Events Fund

As the ball dropped into the 18th hole, cheers from the stands echoed out across the wide expanses of green at Hong Kong Golf Club. All in attendance had been left rapt by a fantastic weekend of golf, and they showed their appreciation as the booming voice of the announcer proclaimed: "It's been another memorable UBS Hong Kong Open, with European Tour history being made today at lovely Fanling." But the story of this year's tournament had begun much earlier, before the golfers even set foot on the fairway.

Thanks to the financial support of the Mega Events Fund, Hong Kong is geared to become an integral stop on many international sports and entertainment itineraries, and the latest beneficiary was the 2012 UBS Hong Kong Open, which took place from November 15 to 18. The

tournament welcomed top golfers, including current world number one Rory McIlroy, four-time US PGA Tour winner Matt Kuchar, 18-time European Tour champion Miguel Ángel Jiménez, US Major champion John Daly, and a trio of Major champions comprising Padraig Harrington, Paul Lawrie and YE Yang. What was supposed to be a four-day event expanded to seven, with numerous pre-tournament activities to rev up the city for one of the major stops on the European Tour, and to showcase Hong Kong's heritage and charms.

Early arrivals for the 2012 UBS Hong Kong Open explored the culture of the city on November 12. Matteo Manassero, Paul Casey and Hong Kong's own Wilson Choy visited one of the most exalted landmarks in the city, Wong Tai Sin Temple. During their cultural excursion, the trio tried to divine tournament results with Chinese fortune sticks. The following morning, McIlroy, Kuchar, Harrington, Lawrie and Yang

scaled the top of The Peak Tower to kickstart the Hong Kong Open activities with a press conference that welcomed the tournament to the metropolis in its 54th year.

A community outreach event was scheduled the next day, when Daly, Manassero and Jiménez conducted a junior golf clinic at the Tuen Mun Golf Centre for 140 eager pupils of the Yan Chai Hospital Number Two Secondary School. Many of the participants had never played before, but they certainly showed great potential – so be on the lookout for these rising stars to grace the lawns in future Hong Kong Opens.

Who would have thought golf would have such an impact on the youth of the city? The chairman of the Mega Events Fund, Jeffrey Lam, certainly did. An avid golfer himself, Lam knew that the key to nurturing sport appreciation in Hong Kong would be to bring one of the oldest professional sporting events to the city. "I think golf is very good for

everybody, for people of all ages," he says. "It's a very relaxing sport and it's a very sociable game."

And so the socialising continued that evening, from the fresh-faced to veteran players. The likes of McIlroy, Lawrie, Kuchar, José María Olazábal and home-grown Steven Lam took over the metropolitan landscape with the Urban Golf Challenge, which transformed Chater Garden into a one-hole golf course. The mini pre-tournament attracted a mighty turnout to witness McIlroy's victory, a stroke of skill that many hoped would continue throughout the tournament.

Unfortunately, the challenging course proved too much for the Race to Dubai champion, as McIlroy failed to make the cut on day one. However, the loss didn't dampen the spirits of the other players or the hordes of spectators, many of whom flew in to witness what was to become history in the making. After an exhilarating four days, the well-deserved victor of the US\$2 million prize was confirmed by the announcer. "The man who emerged on the top of the pile is the ever-popular Miguel Ángel Jiménez," the booming voice proclaimed. "The 19th win of his career is his sixth European Tour win at Asia, and that makes him the oldest-ever winner on the European Tour."

A historic win for Jiménez and the European Tour, the 2012 UBS Hong Kong Open was also a resounding triumph for Mega Event Fund. And, with the fund's initiative to make Hong Kong a major tourism destination, 2013 looks to be an exciting year for the city. ■



Clockwise From Top Left Mega Events Fund chairman Jeffrey Lam with Urban Golf Challenge winner McIlroy; ultimate victor Miguel Ángel Jiménez made European Tour history with his win; future and veteran golfers at the junior golf clinic; Matt Kuchar, Padraig Harrington, McIlroy, YE Yang and Paul Lawrie atop the Peak Tower; Matteo Manassero, Paul Casey and Wilson Choy try to divine the tournament's outcome

Above
Rory McIlroy tees off at the Urban Golf Challenge

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