

BMW International Open 2011



Press release
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BMW International Open 2011: Kaymer-mania comes to Eichenried. Pablo Larrazábal triumphs in a dramatic, historic play-off.

Spaniard prevails over compatriot Sergio García at the fifth extra hole in the longest play-off in the tournament's history.

Munich. Pablo Larrazábal has won the BMW International Open 2011. In one of the most exciting final rounds in the tournament's history and one of the most memorable conclusions to any European Tour event, the 28-year-old Spaniard emerged victorious from a play-off with his fellow countryman Sergio García. In the end, a birdie on the fifth extra hole sealed a famous win. Local favourites Marcel Siem (from Ratingen) and Martin Kaymer ended the tournament in a tie for 14th and 18th place respectively.

"Beating one of my heroes when I was growing up – and in a play-off as well – is just a dream," beamed Larrazábal, who celebrated his second victory on the European Tour after his success in the Open de France in 2008. Barcelona-born Larrazábal, who finished third in last year's event, dedicated the win to his late grandfather: "Last week we lost my granddad, the captain of the family, and this is for him."

So high was the standard of play in this all-Spanish head-to-head that Larrazábal had to play the five extra holes in three under par to secure victory – and the €333,330 winner's cheque. It was the longest play-off in the tournament's history. Both players carded a 68 for their final round of regulation play, emphasising just how little there was between them. Larrazábal ultimately won the tournament with a four-round total of 272 (68+67+69+68, 16 under par).

17,400 spectators followed the dramatic finale live at the course. A total of 62,700 fans flocked to Eichenried over the tournament week, equalling the record set in 2006. Next year, the BMW International Open will take place for the first time in Pulheim near Cologne, before returning to Eichenried in 2013 for its 25th anniversary.

"We've seen spectacular shots and some truly wonderful golf," summed up tournament president Karsten Engel, BMW Group Vice President Sales Germany. "The final stages of the tournament were unbelievably exciting as the two Spanish matadors went head-to-head. We would like to offer Pablo Larrazábal our warmest congratulations. This year we have welcomed even more golf fans to Eichenried, and now we're looking forward to the 2012 edition of the BMW International Open at the new venue in Pulheim near Cologne."

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German superstar Martin Kaymer, who finished the tournament with a round of 69 for a total of 279, was also in positive mood. "I'm very happy with my game, but unfortunately I couldn't hole enough putts," said the world number three. "I'm on the right path and will take a lot of positives away from this BMW International Open."

The major-winner and BMW Golf Ambassador sparked what can only be described as a bout of Kaymer-mania at Eichenried on Sunday. A crowd of mainly children and young people gave the 26-year-old a pop-star reception. Kaymer enjoyed the opportunity to meet the fans up close, and explained: "It's all a lot of fun. I look forward to playing against these guys one day."

One shot better off than Kaymer after the four rounds was Marcel Siem, who signed for a final-round 70. Kaymer's fellow Rhinelander picked up six birdies, but three dropped shots at the par-5 holes deprived him of an even better result. "This is my home course and I got within touching distance of the leaders," said a suitably consoled Siem. "I leave Eichenried in good spirits."

The BMW International Open 2011 will also stick in the memory as a tournament of come-backs. Take Henrik Stenson, the former world number four and BMW International Open winner in 2006, who has since dropped out of the top 100 in the world rankings. After leading the field at the half-way stage, the Swede came home ninth. And the galleries also witnessed García emerge from the most difficult period of his career at Eichenried, the former world number two coming closer to winning a tournament than at any time since his last victory at the back end of 2008.

Larrazábal has also experienced some low points since that 2008 triumph in France, and his route to glory in the BMW International Open on Sunday featured plenty of surprising twists and turns. Six birdies over the first 11 holes took him clear of the leader at the start of the day, England's Mark Foster. But García also had his foot firmly on the gas, following up birdies on five, six, seven and eight with eagles on nine and 11. A clenched fist and a bow before the galleries appeared to be the gestures of a man engaged in an inexorable charge to victory.

However, the Spaniard hasn't won on the European Tour since 2008 and the nerves promptly set in. That eagle on 11 was followed by a run of three bogeys in grim succession and another dropped shot at the 16th. Only Larrazábal's pair of bogeys at 13 and 16 kept García in with a chance of a play-off, an opportunity he grasped with both hands by holing a birdie at the last.

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The overtime showdown took the two players back to the 18th hole, the iconic par-5 getting a second chance to host the closing drama of the BMW International Open. The Spaniards both nailed the perfect drive and were locked in animated conversation as they made their way down the fairway. Their second shots were likewise almost equal in their perfection, both landing in the heart of the green. Even on the putting surface, the two were reading from the same lines. First Larrazábal, then García slid their putts millimetres past the cup.

And so it was back to the 18th tee once again, and this time García was left with significantly more work to do after the two drives. However, a wonderful chip to the flag out of the rough in front of the green set him up for a birdie. Larrazábal needed two putts, so the decision remained in the balance.

The BMW International Open rule-book stipulates that the par-3 12th should be used as the third extra hole, and after the iron shots it was once again advantage Larrazábal, García having left himself a putt from the collar of the green. The ball set off bang on course, but pulled up at the last moment, teetering almost inexplicably on the lip of the hole. García sank to his knees. Larrazábal, though, was unable to capitalise and García lived on.

Next up was the 17th, another par 3. Again the pair both pulled out excellent tee shots, again the putts failed to drop. On this occasion it was Larrazábal who was just a whisker away. The Spaniard remained motionless on the green for several seconds, as if unable to take it all in.

Soon, though, he was sporting an altogether brighter expression. With the shorter holes having failed to pick a winner, back we went to the 18th tee. García's drive left him better placed, but he struck his eagle putt so aggressively that it ended up well past the hole. His return putt also rolled agonisingly long, leaving his opponent with two putts for victory. Almost two hours after the end of his final round in regulation play Larrazábal finally holed the crucial putt to win a BMW International Open few of those present will ever forget.

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