

Georgia Wins Isleworth Event

Oklahoma State's Pablo Martin shoots 4-under par to take individual honors.

• By Steve Elling
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A beamed Chris Kirk walked up to the 17th green at Isleworth Country Club on Tuesday with a slight smirk on his face and his palms pointed toward the sky. Even with a gold bag strapped to his back, he managed a shrug.

What could he do? He had reached the lengthy par-5 in two prolific pokes only to be upstaged by a near once-in-a-lifetime moment.

"I thought I hit a pretty good shot," Kirk said.

Just not as solid as the one by Oklahoma State's Pablo Martin, who nearly holed a miraculous 4-iron and barely missed a rare double-eagle as he nailed down the individual title at the second annual Isleworth-UCF Collegiate Invitational.

Kirk, a junior at Georgia, battled Martin to tie in the individual race at Isleworth last year, and after 51 holes this time around, they were dead even. Martin, the nation's top-ranked player by *Golfweek* magazine, double-bogeyed the 15th hole to let Kirk pull even, then produced some major theatrics.

"That was really a slap in the face," said Martin, a personable sophomore from Spain. "It made me realize I had some more holes left to play."

What he gave Kirk wasn't a slap, it was an outright uppercut. After rolling in a 3-footer for birdie at No. 16, Martin creamed his drive on the 17th, a par-5 of 590 yards. He hammered a 4-iron from 224 yards that landed in the upslope fronting the green, hopped onto the putting surface and rimmed around the cup.

The two-dozen people who watched the approach shot could not believe the ball didn't go in the hole. Some thought it did, but was deflected away by the flagstick. He tapped in for an eagle from one inch and help on for a two-stroke victory over Kirk at 4-under par overall.

"It was really lucky," Martin said. "It could have bounced a half-meter short or something. Yeah, it was a lucky shot. You still had to hit it, though."

It was a brilliant ending to a difficult afternoon. With winds blowing steadily at 25 mph and Isleworth playing at 7,493 yards, it took the final group 6 hours and 5 minutes to play 18 holes. There were whitecaps on Lake Butler and, though there were 18 five-man teams in the event, not a single player broke par in the final round when the scoring average was 80.

Top ranked Georgia, the defending Isleworth and NCAA Division I champion, won the team title at 8 over, beating Oklahoma State by seven shots. Georgia's Kevin Kisner shot 72 in the final round to finish third individually, posting the low total of the day.

Georgia might not see a course the rest of the year that's tougher than Isleworth under cool and blustery conditions.

"I hope not," Georgia Coach Chris Haack said. "Look at those scores. Those are ego killers."

Completing the event almost caused tournament organizers to croak. What was supposed to be three consecutive days of 18-hole play became a 36-hole sprint on Sunday, as players completed the first two rounds with five minutes of daylight to spare. Monday was a washout because of Hurricane Wilma.

"Most of us didn't do anything," Kirk said of the odd offday. "I don't think any of us got out of bed before noon. It's been a different week. They did an unbelievable job with this tournament to get all the rounds in."

After Absorbing 3 1/2 inches of rain. Isleworth had a 40-man crew working Monday, cleaning up fallen tree branches and pumping out flooded bunkers.

"It was a three-day tournament," said Andy Odenbach of the host Tavistock Group, "but it felt like seven."



Georgia's Kevin Kisner