

This year's Women's Australian Open had it all. A backdrop of tragedy, a strong international field plus home-grown stars, the face of the future in young and very young players, and victory to a veteran in a dramatic finish.

It's Laura's Aussie Open

By Karen Harding

When, in the end, it couldn't be Karrie and it couldn't be Katherine, when the Korean challenge finally petered out and a Spaniard mistook the score, it was the *grande dame* of women's golf, Laura Davies, who took out the 2009 Women's Australian Open at The Metropolitan Golf Club in Melbourne.

In a see-sawing final round that had no less than six players holding the lead at different points during the afternoon, 45 year old Davies had to use all her power, guile and experience – and just a smidge of good fortune – to emerge the winner by one shot over Spain's Tania Elosegui.

Davies, who was 11 shots behind the leaders after two rounds, flew home with rounds of 67 and 68 to finish at seven-under but thought she had blown her chances at the last.

After making eagle into a strong headwind on the 422m par-five 14th, Davies followed with a brilliant birdie from the rough at the 15th to be two shots in front with three holes to play, before finishing bogey-birdie-bogey to leave her fate in the hands of those following.

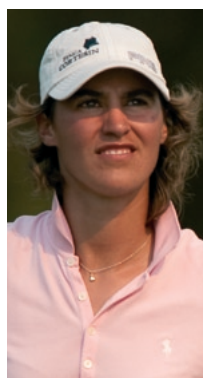
When a roar from the 17th signalled a birdie and one shot lead to Elosegui, Davies could only sit and rue her "worst tee shot of the week" on the final hole and the par putt which burned the edge but would not drop.

She could not have imagined in her wildest dreams what was to follow.

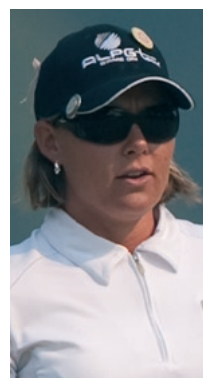
Elosegui had checked a leaderboard at the 17th which had not yet recorded Davies' bogey. She calculated she needed birdie to win, when par would have done it, and watched in disappointment as her second shot fell in a greenside bunker.

Thinking she needed to make her six-metre putt for a play-off, she charged it past then pulled the next from just over one-metre, to fall short by one. Only then did she become aware of Davies' score – and what might have been.

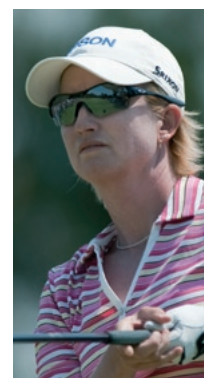
Asked whether she would have tackled the first putt differently had she known the correct situation, Elosegui replied, "Of course. But I have played consistently all four days and I am very happy about that. It is a shame about the last hole but these things happen. I came here just to practise because the weather was so



Tania Elosegui (2nd)



Katherine Hull (=6th)



Karrie Webb (=6th)

bad in Spain and I have had a good tournament so I am really, really happy about that."

For Davies, this was her 74th career win, her seventh in Australia and her second Women's Australian Open. Her first was at Concord in 2004.

Winning was made all the more satisfying by the challenge presented by the combination of a tough but fair course and the strong southerly winds which held sway throughout the week.

"That's what made it such a good win, it's such a good course. You've got to have every part of your game," she said.

She was also chuffed by her come-from-behind victory.

Asked what odds she would have given herself before teeing off in the final round, keen punter Davies replied, "Someone told me I was 16/1 and I thought that was a very generous price because I knew how well I was hitting it. If someone had asked me what I thought, I would have said, well, get some on.

"I was very disappointed on Friday. Knowing how well I was playing, I was still four-over for the tournament and, I must admit, I thought I was out of it. It just goes to show. On a normal course, you'd probably say that was too far back but on a hard course like this, it proves that it wasn't too far."

Koreans Chang-hee Lee and Hye Yong Choi tied with Melissa



Laura Davies, winner of the 2009 Women's Australian Open

Reid of England for third, one shot behind Elosegui. The gallant Webb and Hull both fought to the end to finish next best and the best of the Australians.

Aged just 16, Justine Lee, a one-handicapper from New South Wales, was the leading amateur at five-over.

Chang-hee Lee and Choi, the two young Koreans aged 20 and 18 respectively, each had opportunities to win.

Lee was the overnight leader going into the final day but a poor start cost her. On the final hole, a hole-out from the fairway was her only chance to tie Davies. It was not to be.

Choi jumped out of the gates to be four-under after seven holes but wilted mid-round with some poor putting. Playing one group ahead of Lee and two behind Davies, she birdied at the penultimate hole for a glimmer of hope for the tie but three-putted from the back of the treacherous 18th green.


























Along with Elosegui, she joins good company in Greg Norman, three-putting at Metropolitan to lose an Australian Open.

LET 2008 Rookie of the Year Melissa Reid finished third for the second year in succession. The athletic young Brit made five birdies in the first 11 holes, including the difficult 11th bogeyed by both the winner and runner-up, but faltered at the 16th and eventually just ran out of holes.

For Webb and Hull, Webb in particular, it was a frustrating week.

Hull made a run on Sunday with four birdies in six holes before bogeys at 7 and 10 stopped her. From then on, she, too, had issues with her putter but can surely return to the LPGA Tour with a great deal of confidence after an Australian summer that saw her finish top ten in all four events and take out the ANZ Ladies Masters at Royal Pines.

2009 WOMEN'S AUSTRALIAN OPEN Top 25 Finalists

Pos	Player		Total
1	Laura Davies		-7
2	Tania Elosegui		-6
3	Melissa Reid		-5
	He Yong Choi		-5
	Chang-Hee Lee		-5
6	Katherine Hull		-2
	Karrie Webb		-2
8	Nikki Campbell		-1
	Lisa Hall		-1
	Marianne Skarpnord		-1
	Hye Youn Kim		-1
	Clare Queen		-1
13	Georgina Simpson		Even
	Christel Boeljon		Even
	Diana D'alessio		Even
16	Sarah Oh		+1
	Anne-Lise Caudal		+1
	Alison Walshe		+1
19	Becky Brewerton		+2
	Gwladys Nocera		+2
	Joanne Mills		+2
	Lynn Kenny		+2
	Susie Mathews		+2
	Nicole Garrett		+2
	Rebecca Hudson		+2

For a complete list of results please visit www.alpg.com.au



"I have set myself some pretty big challenges for this year (top ten on the money list and top ten world ranking) but I am going to give it a try. I am no longer going to accept mediocrity," she said.

Defending champion Webb lost no fans in her attempt at a fifth title and a hat-trick of wins.

Opening with a brilliant seven-under 66 in difficult conditions on the first day to lead by three shots, Webb came back to the field and had to watch as her first round score was good enough to win the tournament outright.

Known for never giving up, Webb's last five holes consisted of two excellent birdies and two birdie putts which just slipped by. If only her dream start and fighting finish had met without the frustrating and out-of-sorts middle.

The grouping of Webb and Davies on the last day was a promoter's dream. Between them, they now hold the last four Women's Australian Opens played as well as 11 majors and approximately 115 titles worldwide.

On the Tuesday preceding the tournament, Davies, on her 19th visit to Australia, was made an honorary member of the ALPG in recognition of her support to the game in this country.

For the fans watching, many with heavy hearts after the bushfire tragedy which had devastated Victoria just a few days earlier, her win provided the feel-good result they craved.

After all, if our national championship can't be won by an Aussie, then an honorary one is just as good.

When winning isn't everything

- Former professional golfer Fiona Pike called on a few handy supporters to help her with the "Fiona Pike Skin Cancer Awareness" site in the tented village at Metropolitan. Tournament winner Laura Davies as well as Karrie Webb, Katherine Hull and others signed autographs to help get the message across to spectators to take care in the hot sun.

Pike, who was diagnosed with an internal melanoma and passed away in April, was a popular player on both the LET and LPGA tours. Donations will be used to promote her cause and to assist those with the disease.

- Golf Australia has donated the gate-takings from the final day of the Women's Australian Open to the Victorian Bushfire Relief Appeal. In addition, collectors with buckets accepted cash and coin donations from spectators, players and officials across the four days.

Other fundraising initiatives are being planned throughout golfing centres in Australia.

Details from www.golfaustralia.org.au, your state association or club.

- There was universal praise from players for Metropolitan, some describing it as the best they had played. Unusually, there was not one complaint and, to a man (or should that be woman), all raved about the "pure" and "true" greens. Richard Forsyth and his team worked long hours to superbly present the course, which had suffered a week of temperatures in the 40s in the lead-up to the event and received no natural rainfall since December.

- Two 12 year olds qualified for the Open. Su-Hyun Oh, a two- handicapper with membership at three clubs – Kingswood, Kingston Heath and Long Island – became the youngest ever qualifier to play the Open. Oh is just weeks younger than Young-min Chi (3) from Long Island. Chi finished at ten-over and Oh at +14.

Other teenagers making the field included Tilly Poulsen (Vic), leading amateur Justine Lee and Samantha Whittle from NSW and Ebony Heard (SA).

- Metropolitan members turned out in force to support club champion Jo Charlton, the 19yo grand-daughter of well known sports broadcaster Tony Charlton, a long-time member of the club. After a creditable first round in extremely trying conditions, Charlton faded to miss the cut but now has invaluable pro tournament experience under her belt.

- Patricia Bridges OBE, after whom the trophy for the Open is named, was there in person to present it to the winner Laura Davies. Mrs Davies, 86, was a long term president of the Australian Ladies Golf Union and initiated the event to give Australian amateurs the opportunity to test their game against professionals.

A member of Metropolitan for 62 years, the still lively and forward-thinking Bridges was made the first life member of the newly formed Golf Australia in 2006.