

# A Date With A Champion

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**After spending a day at Turner Hill Golf Club, the personable Padraig Harrington became a new fan of the club and made a lasting impression on the membership**

By Gary Trask

IPSWICH — Padraig Harrington made his first-ever visit to the grounds of the Turner Hill Golf Club on Monday, but apparently it won't be his last.

After taking part in a all-day Wilson Golf outing at the club, Harrington, the reigning British Open champion, wasn't quite ready to jet out of town like you'd expect a celebrity to do once his duties were over. Instead, he spent an additional three hours in the clubhouse, signing anything that anyone handed him, talking golf and baseball with Turner Hill member and Red Sox legend Dennis Eckersley, and sucking up every last minute of his time at the Ipswich-based club that he referred to as "top class" on a numerous occasions throughout the day.

"Before he left, he asked me if he could come back and play the course from the tips someday," said Turner Hill President Bob Talbot. "I laughed and told him not only could he come back and play anytime he wanted to, but there would be a locker in the locker room waiting for him."

Harrington, who turned 36 on Friday, was in town for the Deutsche Bank Championship, which is being played at the TPC in Norton over Labor Day weekend. He began the day with a 7:30 a.m. meet-and-greet, question and answer session over breakfast. That was followed by a all-consuming 25-minute clinic put on by Harrington on the practice range where he covered the entire golf swing in great detail. Each time he struck a ball with his 5-iron, the golfers in attendance "ooohed and aaahhed" as if they were watching a fireworks display.

Then it was time to tee off. The shot gun start began around 10 a.m. and the trim Harrington, dressed in a pink Ireland Bank golf shirt with



blue stripes and blue slacks, made his way around the course, introducing himself to the golfers and playing a few holes with each group.

“It was amazing,” said Chris Garafolo of Peabody, who was granted a spot in the tournament after he won a sales contest at his job at Golfers’ Warehouse. “To be standing there on the tee with a guy like Padraig Harrington - a guy I watched win the British Open on TV about a month ago – was kind of surreal. He couldn’t have been nicer. He talked with us and showed us a few things about our swings. It was really a chance of a lifetime that I’ll never forget.”

Garafolo played the par-3 18<sup>th</sup> hole with Harrington and matched him par for par.

“I put my tee shot about 35 feet to the left of the pin and then two-putted and Padraig complimented me on my first putt,” said Garafolo, who reported that Harrington put his tee shot just inside 20 feet and followed with a similar two-putt. “I was a little nervous with him standing there but he was such a great guy he really put everyone at ease.”

As he walked the course, Harrington raved about the conditions.

“This golf course is beautiful, it’s in fantastic shape,” said Harrington, who has made more than \$10 million in his PGA Tour career. “Right off the bat, after playing a few holes, I can tell it’s the kind of course that’s very fair, but with opportunities to score well if you strike the ball solid.

“I’m impressed by the lovely setting. It’s calm and quiet. [Superintendent John Sadowski] has done everything right. There’s not a blade of grass out of place. The greens couldn’t be better. The whole course - the fairways, the tee boxes – show he has done his job. It’s a course to be proud of.”

And proud the membership was on Monday to have a player – and person – of Harrington’s caliber in its presence.

“It was a great day for Turner Hill,” said Talbot. “Everybody couldn’t get over what a great guy Padraig was. We enjoyed having him and judging by his sincere comments about the course and our staff he enjoyed his day here as well. I told him he has an open invitation to come back, and I’d be surprised if he didn’t take us up on the offer someday.”