

THE Daily Telegraph

Levet wins title

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FRENCHMAN Thomas Levet earned his fourth European Tour title when he overcame Briton Oliver Fisher at the first sudden-death playoff hole at Aloha to win the Andalucia Open today.

Fisher's closing bogey at the 72nd hole and a par by Levet, both for five-under 67s, had locked the pair on 16-under-par 272, three strokes ahead of holder Lee Westwood of Britain.

Australia's second-round co-leader Matthew Millar finished nine off the pace after rounds of 67 69 72 73.

Fisher, 19, and in his second season on the European Tour, looked as though he had the title in his grasp when he came to the final hole a stroke ahead of Levet but he found the pond with his drive to bogey.

Levet saved par to send the tournament into extra holes.

At the first sudden-death hole, Fisher came up short of the green to bogey, while Levet's two putts for par earned him the 250,000 dollars first prize.

Former European number one Westwood, the leader of the first and third rounds, had looked the likely winner at first. He began the day a stroke ahead of the field and kept his lead with another fine start to the round.

Westwood had birdied the first five holes the previous day and this time picked up four shots in the first six.

However, playing partner Fisher refused to be shaken off and cruised three ahead of the field before Levet fought back.

Bogeys on the 13th and 14th for Fisher and birdies at 14, 16 and 17, a crucial 25-foot putt, by Levet were the prelude to the shootout.

For 39-year-old Levet, a 2004 Ryder Cup man and runner-up in the 2002 British Open, it proved the completion of rehabilitation from the vertigo that threatened to end his career in 2006 and kept him out of golf for six months.

"When you look at 2006, just to be standing up was a victory and I am happy just to be able to play tournaments again," Levet told a news conference.

"When you've played Ryder Cup two years before and been in a playoff for the British Open not long before and then you are just trying to keep your card it is tough.

"But I remembered back to those times today and I was able to put the pressure on Oliver, who is one the best guys I've played with, including Tiger Woods and Nick Faldo."

Westwood, who will spend a week at home practising before appearing in the US Masters, was happy

enough with the defence of his title and his performance the week before tackling Augusta.

"I played pretty good but the fifth and ninth holes rather took the wind out of my sails after I had come out of the blocks again," Westwood told reporters. "I'm taking nothing but positives out of the week."

Jose Maria Olazabal slumped to four-over on his back nine for a 76 to finish two-over, way down the field.

The twice Masters champion was optimistic about his injury comeback and will fly to Houston on Monday to play next week's Houston Open on the US Tour, but an appearance at Augusta in the following week is by no means certain.

"The pain was more bearable today than earlier in the week," said Olazabal, who had a seven-month layoff with rheumatic pain before playing in Andalucia.

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Let's celebrate... Thomas Levet is sprayed with champagne after winning the Andalucia Open.

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