

GOLF: Amateur plans for future after just missing cut in BMW Championship

Ellis looks forward after cruel setback

Picture: ADRIAN JUDD

By **CHRIS WISE**

It was a case of so near and yet so far as Ian Ellis missed out on a bumper payday in the cruellest of fashions at last week's BMW Championship at Wentworth.

The Royal Norwich player produced a memorable back nine of 33 in his second round to claw his way back into the top 70 in the European Tour's flagship event, which boasted a prize fund of more than £2m.

But, unbeknown to him, the cut for this particular tournament came at 65th position and ties – and soon after completing his round he received the shattering news that he would almost certainly be heading home at the weekend.

With 12 players unable to finish their rounds at the rain-affected event, Ellis was obliged to hang around until Saturday morning, but it didn't take long for his fate to be confirmed – and he was then left to reflect on one of the most exciting, yet at the same time frustrating, days of his professional career. The Norfolk man would have been guaranteed over £4,000 had he made the cut, while his earnings would have soared up to well in excess of £20,000 had he worked his way up into the middle of the field over the next two days. Instead he was left with absolutely nothing – and that really hurt.

"Immediately I finished my round on Friday I asked one of the officials where I was in the field and when I was told I was inside the top 70 I was delighted because that is where the cut usually comes," he explained.

"But then I was told it was only the top 65 and ties that would make it and that really did knock me back. I knew then that I would need a miracle to get in for the weekend, with four more players dropping back to three over, and sadly that didn't happen.

"I had to come along on Saturday just in case – but it wasn't long before I was heading for home and thinking about what might have been. It wasn't much fun watching the rest of the tournament on the television, I can tell you."

Ellis, who qualified for the event via the PGA's Eastern region order of merit, appeared to be fighting a losing battle to make the cut when he followed up his opening round of 76 by

dropping shots on each of his first three holes on Friday afternoon. That took him out to seven over par, but a superb eagle at the 552-yard par five fourth reignited his challenge and although he dropped two more shots before the turn he refused to be downhearted.

While the likes of Ian Poulter (77), Darren Clarke (74) and Ernie Els (74) were struggling to come to terms with a combination of a difficult golf course and miserable conditions, Ellis went on a magnificent run with birdies at the 11th, 14th, 16th and 18th holes seeing him finish with an excellent one-under par total of 71.

"Obviously I was very disappointed when I learnt it wasn't enough but I was still happy with the way I played," said Ellis, who will be playing in the PGA's Southern Open at the Drift Club in Surrey this week. "I chipped to within an inch or so at the 18th and had that one gone in I would have made the cut, but that's the way it goes.

"I have been working on my game with Guy Ireson at Sprowston Manor and I was pleased with the way I competed. It would have been nice to have made some money, because obviously that is very important as well, but I have got to be positive after that.

"I need to get myself fitter, and build up my physical strength – I know that – but I think I have got the game to compete with a lot of these guys and I'm determined to build on this.

"I'll be going for a tour card later in the year and if I play as well as I can I should have a good chance. This is what I want to do and at the age of 33 I have still got plenty of time to make a mark."

Ellis saved the final word for the friends and relatives who travelled down to Wentworth to watch him mix it with some of the best players in the world.

"I should imagine around 20 to 30 people were there to support me over the two days and that was very much appreciated," he said. "I'm sure they were as disappointed as me when I didn't make it but hopefully I'll be back next year and can play all four days – that's certainly my aim."

Norfolk's other player at Wentworth, Tour regular Andrew Marshall, finished six shots behind Ellis after recording rounds of 78 and 75.

DISAPPOINTED: Royal Norwich's Ian Ellis, who just missed the cut in the BMW Championship at Wentworth.

Rusedski crashes out despite fightback

TENNIS

Greg Rusedski has endured some of the chilliest afternoons of his career on the red clay of Roland Garros.

But few can have been as frustrating as his 3-6 1-6 6-4 6-7 first round defeat against a man from Chile called Paul Capdeville.

Rusedski hates the red dust and the rain. He hates slow conditions. He is not keen on the bigger tennis ball they have introduced this year. Most of all, as a man who relies so heavily on his serve, he abhors the wind.

Roland Garros saved up the full set yesterday for Rusedski's match against a South American who languished 84 places below him in the world rankings, but who was brought up to feel entirely at home on the surface.

And while Rusedski fought as valiantly as always to extend the match to four sets and save four match points in the bargain in a tense tie-breaker, at the end all he had to show for his labour in the cold and wind was a racket with a broken string, a pair of red-stained socks and another early exit in a Grand Slam.

Would it be his last tango in Paris, came the obvious inquiry from a questioner in search of a headline.

Rusedski replied: "I don't know if that was my last tango in Paris. Who knows? Maybe I'll tango one last time."

But not before he heads for the green, green grass of home and a surface which is better suited to his serve-volley game and his need these days for swift points.

He plans to play Queen's and Nottingham before Wimbledon.

The plain fact, however, is that Rusedski has not been past the first round at Roland Garros since 2001.

What is more, if Andy Murray beats Gael Monfils in their eagerly anticipated Centre Court encounter today, it means Rusedski will almost certainly also lose his number one domestic ranking.

Rusedski added: "It was tough for both of us but I did not serve well and he took advantage. He played better than me for the first two sets. The flow of play wasn't going for me and that's tennis sometimes.

"But I think I've shown I can play on clay this season. I just need warmer conditions. With the rain and wind it is hard for me to win matches."



EARLY EXIT: Greg Rusedski.

SPORT IN BRIEF

Disappointed Button rules out home victory

FORMULA ONE: Jenson Button admits British fans are unlikely to have much to celebrate at Silverstone in two weeks, claiming he will be lucky to even make the top four. The 26-year-old completed a miserable Monaco Grand Prix in 11th place on Sunday after struggling with his under-performing Honda car. And Button does not believe the problems which left him dicing it out with Formula One's backmarkers will be solved in time for his home race on June 11. He believes Honda are too slow to challenge the front-running teams and claims Rubens Barrichello's fourth place at Monaco was better than the team expected. Button said: "We are not blinded by the fourth position Rubens had – we have a lot of work to do. We have a test next week but I don't think our problems will be solved. We are not going to be challenging the Renaults."

Harrison to return?

BOXING: Frank Warren claims troubled WBO featherweight champion Scott Harrison could make a return to boxing on the same bill as Alex Arthur in September. The Cambuslang fighter is currently battling depression and alcohol problems which caused him to pull out of his title defence against Gairy St Clair in Belfast. Brushing aside speculation that the 28-year-old's career was in jeopardy, Promoter Warren said: "If Peter (Harrison, Scott's father) is saying that Scott could be back boxing in September then that's something that I will look at. It's fantastic news and hopefully things are looking up for him."

Wheldon misses out

MOTOR RACING: For most of the 90th Indianapolis 500, it appeared that England's Dan Wheldon would breeze to his second-straight win in America's greatest race. Instead, Wheldon left with bitter disappointment, finishing fourth in a race where he led for 148 of the 200 laps. After winning the race for the first time in 2005, he got to watch America's biggest open-wheel racing star Sam Hornish Jr celebrate an Indy 500 win for the first time. Wheldon took the lead for the first time on the ninth lap and was in front at the 100, 200, 300 and 400-mile marks. The only thing missing was the milestone that mattered the most, to be in the lead at the 500-mile mark, but Wheldon was well out of serious contention by then.

Seize the moment

RUGBY UNION: England head coach Andy Robinson has challenged his experimental squad for the two-match tour to Australia to stake their claims for regular places in the build-up to the 2007 World Cup in France. Robinson, who has given the nucleus of his side the summer off to recharge their batteries, threw down the gauntlet. "For any player who gets an opportunity, it's about being in possession of the shirt and it's about performing to stay in possession," he said. "Having been a player myself, all you ever wanted was to be given the opportunity and these players have this opportunity."

Double points bonanza

MOTOR RACING: Racers in the Bennetts British Superbike Championship are to compete for double points at the final round in October following the cancellation of the event in Ireland. Torrential rain on race day led to the two races at Mondello Park in Ireland, the fifth round of the series, being called off.