



Team Matches Title Returns To Little Mill

In a stunning conclusion to the Golf Association of Philadelphia's grandest event, underdog Little Mill edged powerful defending champion Philadelphia Cricket Club by 4 points to win the 2016 BMW GAP Team Matches Playoff on Saturday. Little Mill posted 60½ points to Cricket's 56½ points followed by Huntingdon Valley with 51½ and Llanerch with 47½.

The difference was the play of Little Mill's Michael Dunn. In the final group at Cricket's Militia Hill, the final course to finish play, the

25-year-old from Marlton, N.J., won the maximum 9 points to erase a 3-point deficit and to seal the unlikely victory. It is Little Mill's third Team Matches title and first since winning back-to-back championships in 2011-12.

"It was the biggest spot I've ever been in," said Dunn. "Two years ago I played here and on the final hole I chunked my ball into the hazard. I was thinking about that today, but I hit a 7-iron from 180 yards to 20 feet. The last 2-footer for par was tough. This is huge for the guys."

Subplots to the Little Mill miracle were many. Just to reach the Playoff, Little Mill needed to defeat Overbrook in the final regular-season week and come out on top of a points tiebreaker to advance. It did. That scenario was necessitated after a Week 2 defeat to Philadelphia Cricket Club's second team.

Add to the mix, Little Mill's players came in light on Playoff experience. It fielded only three players from the 2012 title team. In that year, Dunn was a second-teamer.

On Saturday, it was the three 2012

Little Mill veterans that got its team off to a good start. Captain Michael Hyland, his father Tom Hyland, and Jim Arsenault all played at home and turned in a solid collaborative effort with 17 total points. Cricket tallied a site-high 18.

The Playoff format, different from the regular season, featured three players for each participating club at each venue. Each player competed in a three-way match against one foe from another team.

When Huntingdon Valley and Llanerch sites reported scores, in that order, Little Mill trailed Cricket by 3½ points.

"After the team struggled at Llanerch, I thought we had no chance," said Michael Hyland, of Medford, N.J. "I pretty much threw in the towel."

When the first two groups at Militia Hill finished, the defending champ had a 3-point edge, 54½-51½. However, murmurs from a collection of team members from the four clubs on the hillside overlooking the 18th green had Little Mill with a strong showing in the final group. So much so that talk of a possible tie was in the air. That was until Dunn delivered.

"I couldn't be happier for Mike," Hyland said. "I played with him a couple of days ago. On the 15th hole that day, I said, 'Pretend this is the last hole of the Team Matches and you need to make this putt to win the match for yourself and the club.'

MID-AM UPCOMING

Scott McNeil of Bala Golf Club is set to defend his Middle-Amateur Championship title May 25-26 at Waynesborough Country Club in Paoli, Pa.

McNeil edged a fast-closing Jeff Osberg of Huntingdon Valley by a stroke last year.

The 33rd Mid-Am is for players 25 and older; it is the first major of the GAP season.

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From left, James Gillespie and Paul Bickford congratulate Michael Dunn after he clinches the title for Little Mill.

"He made the birdie putt that day. I said, 'Keep that in your head.' "

It was a hard result for Cricket, winners of two of the past three Team Matches titles, and heavy favorites to repeat.

"It doesn't get any better than that, does it?," said Cricket captain Rob Savarese Jr., of Lafayette Hill, Pa. "I'm very proud of the way the guys played. Little Mill deserved it. They played the best. That's why we play on Saturday.

"If there is one thing I've learned about this event, a one-round event, it's that everybody has to play well to win. We didn't play well enough as a group to win today." ●

RESULTS

Martin D. Emeno Jr.