

Tom Lewis scoops rookie award

Tom Lewis has followed in the footsteps of his home club's most famous figure, Sir Nick Faldo, by being named as the Sir Henry Cotton Rookie of the Year for 2011.

The 20-year-old Englishman from Welwyn Garden City in Hertfordshire claimed the prestigious award 34 years after six-time major champion Faldo also received the accolade before going on to become the most successful English golfer of all time.

Lewis had made history in October by winning on his third professional start on the European Tour

"I appreciate this honour very much. It certainly tops off what has been an amazing year," said Lewis, speaking from the sunshine island of Mauritius where he took part in the Mauritius Open.

"I think my dad is more excited about me winning this award than my first Tour victory in October! I am very proud to be named The Sir Henry Cotton Rookie of the Year and I feel very fortunate as there were some strong contenders for this title who played consistently well all season."

Lewis, who shot to prominence with his opening 65 in this year's Open Championship at Royal St. George's - the lowest round by an amateur in The Open's history and one which gave him a share of the lead - produced the same score in the final round of the Portugal Masters three months later to win on his third professional outing, the quickest victory by an Affiliate Member in Tour history.

In between those historic rounds, Lewis played his part of the Great Britain & Ireland Walker Cup side's victory over the United States at Royal Aberdeen before joining the professional ranks and producing a top-ten finish in his first event, the Austrian GolfOpen presented by Lyoneess.

He then finished 70th in the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship before going on to record his maiden success in Portugal which set up the platform for a final placing of 66th in The Race to Dubai with earnings of €459,266.

To put the achievement in perspective, Tiger Woods required five tournaments to land his first professional title, while Rory McIlroy did not taste success until his 38th European Tour event.

Lewis paid tribute to his father and coach, Brian, a former Tour professional, who has been an influential presence during his son's rise through the amateur game into the professional ranks.

"I might not even have been a golfer if it wasn't for dad, but he has definitely made me into the golfer I've become. He is really the person who made this possible.

"It's been a rollercoaster year. I didn't perform very well in the first half then had the honour of playing with Tom Watson in the first two rounds of The Open, managing to share the first round lead.

"It was wonderful to win the Silver Medal and shoot 65 in the first round, but I think people will remember the 65 in Portugal because it secured my first professional win.

"It only really hit me when I arrived at the airport to fly home when everybody was saying 'well done'. It was something I could scarcely have believed at the start of the season.

"It was a great year and a privilege to be part of the winning Walker Cup team in my final amateur event. But now I have a two year exemption on The European Tour and can't wait to get started in 2012."

Lewis was the choice of a panel comprising The R&A, The European Tour and the Association of Golf Writers, ahead of several strong candidates from the 2010 Challenge Tour including Denmark's Thorbjørn Olesen and Scott Jamieson of Scotland, who both finished ahead of Lewis in The Race to Dubai having qualified for the season-ending Dubai World Championship presented by DP World.

Olesen enjoyed three joint second place finishes in accumulating €637,703 to finish 48th in The Race to Dubai, while Jamieson shared third place on three occasions to finish the year with earnings of €523,754 and 59th place in The Race to Dubai.

Lewis is the 47th recipient of The Sir Henry Cotton Rookie of the Year Award, stretching back to 1960, and the 22nd Englishman, following several illustrious fellow countrymen including the aforementioned Faldo, Tony Jacklin, Peter Oosterhuis, Mark James, Ian Poulter and Paul Casey.

Chris Wood was the last English winner in 2009 while Lewis succeeds 2010 winner, Italian teenager Matteo Manassero.