

Leopard Creek Times

Alfred Dunhill Championship Daily News

ROUND 4, SUNDAY 29 NOVEMBER, 2020



MERONK LEADS YOUNG STARS AT LEOPARD CREEK

Poland's Adrian Meronk will take a one-stroke lead into a final round of the Alfred Dunhill Championship that is poised to showcase some of the finest young talent on both the Sunshine Tour and the European Tour at Leopard Creek on Sunday.

Meronk has already made history this week as the first Polish professional to ever lead a tournament on the European Tour. He now has the chance to add his first European Tour title to that list as he tees off the final round on 14 under par following a third round of 71 on Saturday. After a slow start that saw him bogey two of his opening four holes, Meronk found his form on the back nine and made three birdies in four holes from the turn to keep himself at the top of the leaderboard. "It was a solid comeback at the end

after a slow start. I didn't really play badly, I just made those two bogeys out of nowhere. But I played well the rest of the round. I enjoyed the battle of the third round, and I'm looking forward to the challenge of the final round as well," he said. Meronk's nearest challenger is South African Jayden Schaper, who made an eagle and two birdies in his final four holes on Saturday for a 67. In January Schaper was still an amateur when he challenged the professionals in the South African Open at Randpark Golf Club and went on to finish tied sixth. Almost a year later and he is also hunting

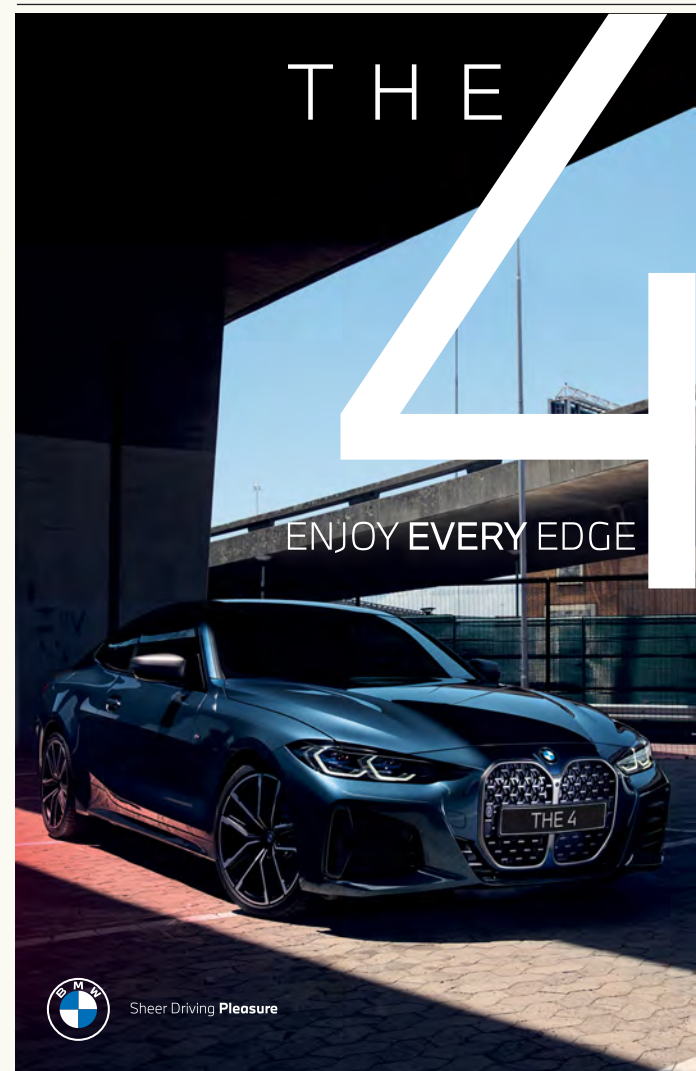
his maiden professional title at Leopard Creek. "If you're nervous it means you're near the top, and that's a good thing. Growing up I've always kept myself in the moment and I've really enjoyed the pressure. So I'm going to go out and enjoy every moment and have the best time of my life out there," he said. Following him is fellow South African Christiaan Bezuidenhout on 11 under par after a 68. Bezuidenhout is already a European Tour champion who this year made his debut in The Masters and finished tied 38th. He finished off his third round with five birdies on

the back nine after turning in one over par for the day. "It was nice to finish with those five birdies. I just couldn't find my rhythm early in the round and got off to a slow start. But the back nine I was hitting it better and got into a better rhythm and it was nice to see couple more putts go in as well," he said.





THE SECRET BEHIND WILCO'S BIG HITTING



BMW
Sheer Driving Pleasure

Wilco Nienaber has grabbed the world's attention with his booming drives on the Sunshine Tour and European Tour this year. But whereas Bryson DeChambeau prefers to bulk up and drink protein shakes to boost his driving stats, Nienaber has a far more pragmatic reason for how he's become one of the longest hitters in world golf. "It's always been a thing for me. I've always hit it long," Nienaber said as he finds himself near the top of the leaderboard in the Alfred Dunhill Championship. "When I was playing junior golf, I played about four age groups ahead of my age group. So I always wanted to try and hit it as far as the older players. Also, my dad never wanted to buy me a driver, so I was hitting a three wood. I also played most sports, not just golf. So that developed quite a few other muscles. But from 15 to 16 years old I could really feel the shift of distance." Nienaber is well aware of the advantage his big drives give him, but it doesn't mean he's neglecting other areas of his game.

"Hitting it far does help and I'm working in the gym to enhance that even more. But you've still got to get the ball in the hole." The 20-year-old star also remembers the first time he realised just how far he actually hits the ball. "As an amateur, when I played a golf course where there was a professional tournament, it did surprise me that I was hitting it where the pros hit it. Then when I started playing in professional tournaments as an amateur, it was a bit of a shock for me to see that I was hitting it past the professionals." Nienaber has a very clear swing through when he unleashes those booming drives. "The thing for me is to always focus on having the club in the right position at the top so that I can give it the right amount of force on the downswing. If you're not in the right position at the top a lot can go wrong at that speed. So I really focus on my backswing and a nice and developing a nice slow rhythm and finishing my backswing properly. From there I can really launch it."



Adrian Meronk is ready to pounce on golf history.

MERONK MAKING HISTORY

The Alfred Dunhill Championship has had a number of firsts over the years, and Adrian Meronk made for yet another one at Leopard Creek. Meronk has become the

first Polish professional to lead a European Tour event, and this after he became the first Polish professional to ever earn European Tour membership. Meronk was introduced to golf by his father,

who held the unofficial title of Poland's number one golfer. They would drive three hours to the golf course to play, until at the age of 15 Meronk's family moved closer to the Toya Golf and Country

Club, where he is still a member. He honed his golf skills on the American college circuit and at East Tennessee State University, and where he played against the likes of Justin Thomas, Jon Rahm,

Thomas Pieters and Matthias Schwab. Meronk is used to blazing a trail in Polish golf. As an amateur he was the first Polish golfer to represent European in the Palmer Cup, and he was also the first Polish player to reach the semi-finals of The Amateur in 2016. A victory at Leopard Creek would be a fitting place for him to make even more golf history.

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Leopard Creek's local "fans" are always keeping an eye on the golf action.



Rush-hour traffic at Leopard Creek.



Christiaan Bezuidenhout shows some unique golf skills with his putter during the third round.



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BUILDING A FUTURE THROUGH GOLF

Throughout its history the Alfred Dunhill Championship has played a key role in the development of the careers of some of the world's leading professionals. But this prestigious Sunshine Tour and European Tour co-sanctioned event and its home at Leopard Creek have also combined to play a vital role in South African golf development.



From Adam Scott's first professional title in 2001 to Justin Rose's breakthrough professional victory in 2002 and Charl Schwartzel winning his first title here in 2004, the Alfred Dunhill Championship runs like a golden thread as having launched the careers of all three of these Major winners. Similarly, the National Junior Development Centre (NJDC) that is located on the world-class practice facility that borders the Leopard Creek course plays an equally important role in the development of South African golf's future champions. Established in 2015, the NJDC supports the historically disadvantaged golfers who form part

of the South African Golf Development Board (SAGDB), as well as South Africa's elite amateur squads under the stewardship of GolfRSA, by giving them full access to a practice facility that is arguably the finest in the world. The SAGDB is the official grassroots development programme of South African golf and has a nationwide footprint with the support of all 14 of South Africa's golf unions. The Alfred Dunhill Links Championship in Scotland, the sister tournament to the Alfred Dunhill Championship, provides much of the funding for the work of the SAGDB through the money raised at this tournament.

"The impact the SAGDB has on these children's lives is immeasurable. We've seen them grow into such confident human beings since they've started playing golf. The game teaches them so much about life," says Edwin Compton, the Golf Development Manager for the SAGDB in Mpumalanga. "In the past our children have been very fortunate to be taught by some of the professionals at the Alfred Dunhill Championship, and the Sunshine Tour also supports us with golf balls and clothing. All of this makes a big difference in the lives of our young golfers and they really appreciate it."



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CROCKER HOPING FOR A TOUGH TEST

At just four shots off the lead going into the final round of the Alfred Dunhill Championship, there is only one version of Leopard Creek that American Sean Crocker wants to see when he tees it up on Sunday. "I hope it's hot and warm and Leopard Creek plays as tough as it usually does," he said. Crocker put together a solid bogey-free 68 to climb into a share of fourth place on 10 under par, and he feels a Leopard Creek course that plays as tough as it usually does will suit him in the battle for this title. "You've got to play good golf here. You can't fake it around this golf course, and that's more enjoyable for me. If you hit a

good shot you get rewarded, and if you hit a bad shot you'll know very quickly all about it because of how tough it is." Crocker has done a superb job of managing his game all week. "I've been putting the ball in the right spots because this course can show its teeth really quickly. It's been my goal this whole week to stop the silly mistakes. Over every shot my caddie and I have thought very hard about where we want the ball to end up. That's key here. "I felt the greens were starting to get quicker in the third round. If they want to make the greens fast and hard here, this can be a very tough golf course. But that's fun, and I'm looking forward to it."

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