

Leopard Creek Times

Alfred Dunhill Championship Daily News

ROUND 2, FRIDAY 27 NOVEMBER, 2020



Robin Roussel.

ROUSSEL, MERONK SHARE LEAD AT LEOPARD CREEK

Frenchman Robin Roussel and Poland's Adrian Meronk both took the most advantage of a receptive Leopard Creek course in Thursday's first round of the Alfred Dunhill Championship and shared the lead with their rounds of seven-under-par 65.

Roussel enjoyed a run of five consecutive birdies from the turn on his way to the top of the leaderboard, while Meronk had two eagles – chipping in from the bunker for one of them – as they opened up a one-stroke lead over the rest of the field. Their nearest challenger is Scotland's Scott Jamieson who birdied four of his last five holes for a 66. Ockie Strydom leads the South African challenge after day one following a rare bogey-free round of four-under-par 68. A bit of overnight rain and cooler conditions softened up the Leopard Creek course on day one of this Sunshine Tour and European Tour co-sanctioned tournament, which allowed particularly the morning field to take advantage. "The course is definitely softer than

what it was when we last played here in December. The greens were soft this morning, but it's still Leopard Creek and a very good course so I'm delighted with a 65," said Roussel. "I had a bunch of good birdies on the back nine. I was lucky enough to have a local caddie on the bag and he read the greens pretty well. I had quality putts in that stretch and it's thanks to him. But overall I'm so happy to be here in the middle of this amazing wildlife. There are so many good vibes here and I think that helped me a lot." Meronk started his round off the 10th, which he birdied. His two eagles came on the par-five 18th and the par-four sixth hole, where he chipped in. "I played really solid and had many chances to go even lower, but I'm

very happy with how I played. I made some good decisions out there. My first eagle on 18 I hit a drive left of the fairway and I hit a six iron to about 15 feet and holed the putt. The second eagle on the sixth I holed a bunker shot. My short game and putting was pretty solid all day. This is my second time at Leopard Creek and I love it here. I love seeing the animals in their natural habitat." Behind them, Jamieson was equally delighted with his start. "A strong finish for a 66 is perfect as far as I'm concerned. I enjoy the tougher conditions this golf course offers. I like a tournament where the winner is 10 under, not 20 under." And Strydom singled out his bogey-free round as his best ever on Leopard Creek. "I think it's probably one of my

best rounds in a very long time. It's mentally tough out there. To keep the bogeys off the card is always special, but especially on a course as tough as this one. I think it's the best round I've ever played here." He's also not too concerned with being three shots back after the first round. "There are always some players that go low in the first round, but my dad always taught me that you can't win the golf tournament on the first day, but you can certainly lose it. I'm just keeping focused on my own game."





Marcel Siem.

SIEM DRAWING ON WINNING MEMORIES

Marcel Siem will always have a soft spot for the Alfred Dunhill Championship, which was his first victory as a European Tour professional. The affable German won the 2004 tournament in a playoff and when the championship was still played at Houghton Golf Club in Johannesburg. But four European Tour victories later, Siem has never forgotten what that first Alfred Dunhill Championship win meant to him.

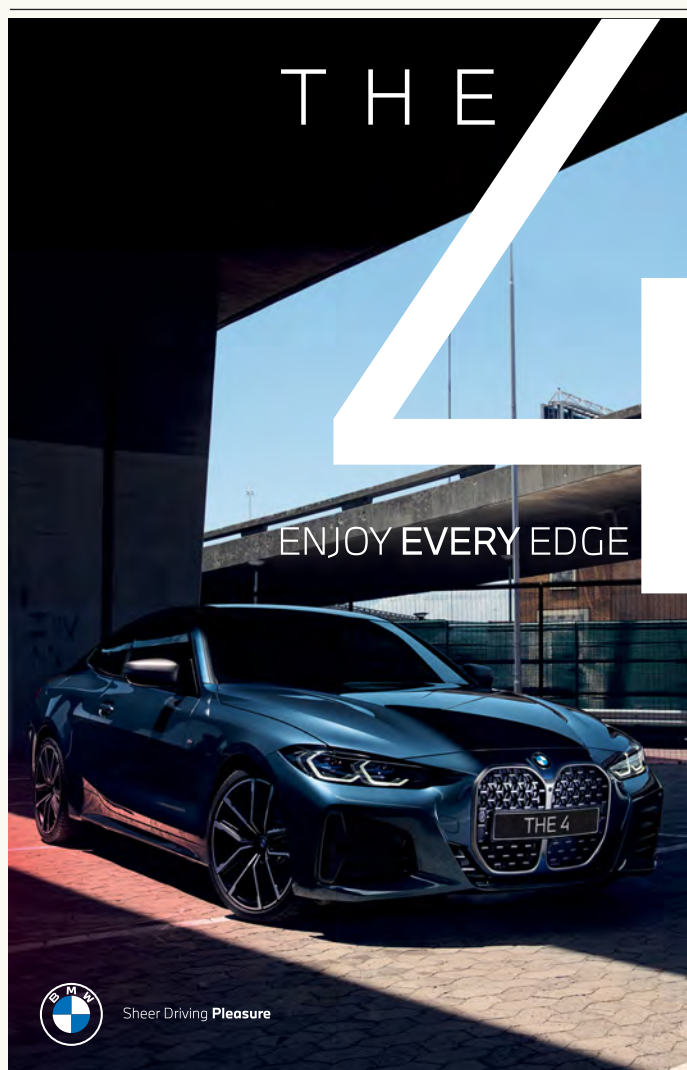
"It's always a special event for me. It doesn't matter if it's Houghton Golf Club or now Leopard Creek, your first win is always the most important one," Siem said after opening with a round of three-under-par 69 in this year's championship.

"In 2004 I was very young. At the time, I didn't even realise what that win meant to be honest. I went through the playoff and that was all fun, and I just

went out there and hit it as hard as I could and everything went my way. And all of a sudden I was a European Tour winner at 24 years old. That was amazing. It's a big relief. All of a sudden sponsors come on board, you get exemptions into other tournaments, and life feels easy.

"Everybody in South Africa still remembers my win, and so do I. It was a great playoff with Raphael Jacquelin and Gregory Havret, who went on to become my best friends on Tour."

A good start in this year's championship has Siem hoping for a return to the winner's circle soon. "To get another one will be a great restart for me. The last three years have been tough. So the memories are fantastic. If it would happen again this week I would start crying. It would mean that much to me. I can wait to have the same feeling again."



Sheer Driving Pleasure

THE REIGN OF SPAIN AT LEOPARD CREEK

The South Africans understandably have the most dominant record in the Alfred Dunhill Championship. But after this country, the Spanish golfers have an equally proud history of triumph at Leopard Creek.

Pablo Larrazabal's victory in the 2019 Alfred Dunhill Championship was the fourth by a Spanish golfer in the history of this championship. Alvaro Quiros was the first to win here in 2006, followed by back-to-back wins from Pablo Martin in 2009 and 2010. Martin also secured a first for Spain in this event, being the first golfer to successfully defend his Alfred Dunhill Championship title.

Quiros believes a mix of the heat and the skill required at Leopard Creek is the reason for Spanish success in this tournament.

"I guess the weather conditions are similar because it's hot like in the summer time in Spain," Quiros said.

"The golf course is demanding and that's a very good way to put everybody in his own position this week. You have to be skilful around the green so it might be related to that.

"Pablo Larrazabal is a great chip and putt player. Pablo Martin as well. Sometimes I'm also pretty good at chipping and putting. It might be related to that."

Quiros believes a mix of the heat and the skill required at Leopard Creek is the reason for Spanish success in this tournament.



Alvaro Quiros started the Spanish success in the Alfred Dunhill Championship with his victory in 2006.

#GREATNESSBEGINSHERE

"GREATNESS BEGINS WITH BEING OBSESSED WITH THE NEED TO GET EVERYTHING 100% RIGHT"

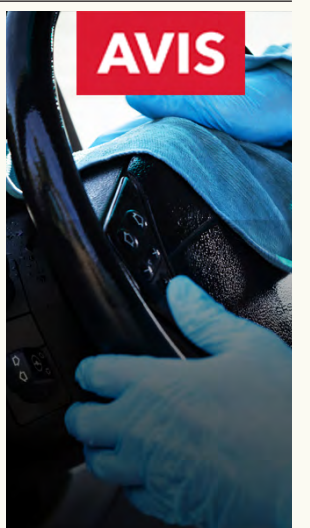
- GARY PLAYER

<p>Brandon Grace SA Open Winner</p>	<p>George Coetzee Portugal Masters Winner</p>	<p>Garrick Higgo Open de Portugal Winner</p>	<p>Daniel van Tonder Sunshine Tour 4x Winner</p>
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Spain's Adri Arnaus putting on the 13th with a few impala as his gallery.



Malaysia's Gavin Green finds the gap he was looking for on his way to a 68.



Lucas Bjerregaard always has a reason to smile when he's playing golf at Leopard Creek.



A TV cameraman giving his all to get the perfect shot of Robert MacIntyre.

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HOT WEATHER AND HOT START SUIT BLAND

England's Richard Bland revealed the secret to his South African success at the moment – the heat.

Bland started the Sunshine Tour and European Tour's South African Swing with a finish of tied seventh in last week's Joburg Open. And he has built on that by opening with a first round of five-under-par 67 to be just two shots off the lead in the Alfred Dunhill Championship.

"I just love coming to South Africa. I'm nearly 48 years old now, and my body works a lot better in the hot weather, which is nice. You know, when it's five degrees at home I tend not to work so well," Bland said.

"But I just love this place. I've been coming to South Africa for nearly 20 years and I fell in love with it the minute I came here. The people are the

best in the world. The food is great. You know, what's not to love about South Africa?"

It was certainly a hot start for Bland as he teed off the 10th and was six under par through his first nine holes. He played the second nine in one over, but was still delighted with his start to this year's tournament.

"Whenever you shoot 67 around here you're happy. I could never have dreamed of the kind of start I had. The greens were rolling so pure that anything you started on line with the right pace was going in. The second nine was a little more tricky for me, but overall I'm very happy. Ever since we came back to playing after lockdown I've been pretty solid."



Richard Bland.



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Zane van Rhyen.

GOLF AND NATURE IN PERFECT HARMONY

As Zane van Rhyen, the Health, Safety and Environmental Officer of Leopard Creek, stands on the banks of the Crocodile River where Leopard Creek and the untamed wilderness of the Kruger National Park meet, he sums up exactly what makes this place so unique in world golf.

"This is where everything happens. This behind me, with the Crocodile River and the animals, is why we say Leopard Creek is the wildlife and a golf course all in one," says Van Rhyen.

Van Rhyen views Leopard Creek as the perfect expression of his own passion for conservation, and he is well aware of the privilege he enjoys working in an environment where maintaining the balance between golf and nature is taken very seriously.

"Having animals on a golf estate with championship grass is a challenge, but it's a passion of mine. Before the start of last year's Alfred Dunhill Championship we had a hippo that broke through the fence and for three weeks every

day I watched it just to keep it off the course. To spend so much time with one animal – I think that's been my favourite experience with the animals here."

The estate enjoys a strong relationship with the neighbouring Kruger National Park as Van Rhyen and his team also play a key role in assisting with the conservation efforts of the Park.

"We are in regular communication with Mr Don English, the head ranger of the Kruger National Park. We work particularly closely with their team on the removal of alien plant species on our estate. We bring in their specialists to remove these alien species and rehabilitate the soil."

Living and working on the estate is indeed a privilege, and there are moments when Van Rhyen will take a drive in his golf cart to what he calls his secret spot, and sit and watch a herd of elephants graze only a few metres away from him or just stare out over the majestic Crocodile River.

"Leopard Creek is the most

peaceful place on earth for me. Just being here just takes away any stress you think you have."

And maintaining the balance that creates this peace is a priority for Van Rhyen and his team.

"That is central to everything that we are constantly trying to keep doing here, namely keeping the wild and the fauna and flora living together in balance with this amazing golf course."

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