

# Leopard Creek Times

Alfred Dunhill Championship Daily News & Order of Play

ROUND 1, THURSDAY 28 NOVEMBER, 2019



## SCHWARTZEL EXCITED TO BE BACK AT LEOPARD CREEK

*If there was ever a place and tournament for Charl Schwartzel to make his comeback from an eight-month injury layoff, then it's Leopard Creek and this week's Alfred Dunhill Championship.*

The 2011 Masters champion makes his return to competitive golf after the longest time away from the game in his professional career because of a wrist injury. And he's picked a tournament he's won four times in 2004, 2012, 2013 and 2015, finished runner-up in four times, and a Leopard Creek course

where he holds the record for the lowest tournament total of 24-under-par 264 and the biggest margin of victory of 12 strokes. "I'm very happy to be back at Leopard Creek. If I was ever going to make a comeback, this was going to be the best place for me to start. For me, just to be able to play and walk the fairways and compete – that will be a win," said Schwartzel.

The South African has always loved Leopard Creek and its combination of world-class golf in the heart of the bush. "You get courses that really suit your eye, and even though they've made a few changes since I last won here, I still feel very comfortable on this golf course. The bush is a place where I go to relax and here I am playing a golf tournament in the heart of the bush.

"It's beautiful, this setting. It has to be the best I've seen this course. I'm very excited to play and it's going to be the best place for me to start."





Ernie Els.

## TOURS ALLOW PROS TO WEAR SHORTS DURING ALFRED DUNHILL CHAMPIONSHIP



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The Alfred Dunhill Championship will play its part in a ground-breaking move for professional golf wherein the Sunshine Tour and European Tour have agreed to allow the players competing in this week's tournament to wear shorts for the duration of the event.

The decision was taken after consultation with the players; Keith Pelley, the Chief Executive Officer of the European Tour; and the tournament host, Mr Johann Rupert; and was unanimously agreed upon in light of the excessive heat forecast for Leopard Creek this week, with temperatures forecast to reach as high as 40°C. At the moment, it applies for this tournament only. "We are very grateful to the European Tour for supporting this decision, and we're excited about it," said Selwyn Nathan, Commissioner of the Sunshine Tour.

"The game has moved on, golf fashion has moved on, and even the weather has changed. We're playing in Africa under beautiful sunshine, and as long as the dress code conforms with that of the club, then I think it will look very good. On the Sunshine Tour we believe #Gr8nessbegins here, and this is certainly a great decision for golf going forward."

In 2016, the Sunshine Tour and European Tour made the decision to allow players to wear shorts during practice rounds and pro-ams.

This policy was also adopted by the PGA Tour this year.

"It was discussed and felt that in this situation it was a good move," said David Williams, the Tournament Director of the European Tour.

"The temperatures will increase as the week goes on, which is uncomfortable and could be a health issue for the players. A lot of players were concerned about it. In these temperatures it can be pretty uncomfortable out there in trousers, so the feedback from the players has certainly been positive."

South Africa's Ernie Els welcomed the decision. "It's very nice when common sense comes into play. It's going to get up to 40°C here and it's the right thing to do. It's been talked about for so long on all of the tours around the world. Mr Rupert is always a man who is forward thinking and I think this could be a game-changer for golf which could end up enhancing the product."

Thomas Bjørn said he is also fully in favour of the decision. "Golf has been moving in this direction and because of the extreme heat we need to make it as comfortable for the players as we can. We are very thankful for the Tours and Mr Rupert for supporting this decision. There are traditions in golf that will always be upheld, but we also need to try and make it easier for kids to get involved in the game and move with the times."





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South African cricket legend Jacques Kallis in the pro-am of the Alfred Dunhill Championship at Leopard Creek.

## PRO-AM PARTICIPANTS PITCH IN FOR SAGDB AND RHINOS

The official pro-am for the Alfred Dunhill Championship set the tone for a week that is regarded by all as one of the most unique in world golf.

A day on the renowned Leopard Creek golf course was followed by a glittering dinner, where R480 000 was raised for the South African Golf Development Board (SAGDB) and Birdies for Rhinos.

*Below: Bongki Mokaba, the promoter of the South African Open hosted by the City of Johannesburg, in action during the Alfred Dunhill Championship Pro-Am.*



### Pro-Am Results

**93 Points:** Richard Sterne, Gaynor Rupert, Cara Treherne, Riette Malherbe

**91 Points:** Ross Fisher, Gerard Rupert, Charlie van Dyk Snr, Eugene Treherne

#### 86 Points Count Out:

George Coetzee, Reg Calmeyer, Henk de Kock, Rayno Strauss

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Brandon Stone.



## STONE READY TO COMPETE WITH THE BEST

South African professionals' love of Leopard Creek is evidenced by the fact that the home golfers have won nine of the last 14 editions of the Alfred Dunhill Championship, including a run of local dominance that wasn't broken from 2011 to 2016. Brandon Stone is the last South African winner of this championship in 2016 and echoed his countrymen's love for this course when he described it as "the holy grail of golf in Africa". "Anytime you come to this special place is fantastic, and the fact that we get to come for a tournament just makes it better."

Stone returns having made several changes to his game, and which he is eager to test out against a strong field this week.

"At the moment I feel like I can compete with the best. I re-evaluated after 2018, and physically I felt I wasn't where I needed to be. I needed to get stronger and fitter to compete with the best players in the world. It's starting to pay dividends now. The game feels really good and I feel very comfortable."

And for Stone, there is no better time for those changes to start paying off than this week.

"I feel at home here. I've often said I feel like this course was built for me. Every hole I stand on, I just love the tee shot and love the way it sets up. So I feel extremely positive, and that 2020 is going to be the best year yet."

# THE X5 M THE X6 M

 COMPETITION



Scan here for more information.





# 'IT'S GOING TO BE A TOUGH TEST'

*The extensive improvements to Leopard Creek have been welcomed by the professionals competing in this week's Alfred Dunhill Championship, with many believing it will make an already tough golf course even more of a challenge.*

“The changes are good, and tough. It really is a tough golf course,” said Branden Grace, the winner of the 2014 Alfred Dunhill Championship.

“The golf course is a little bit longer now with some of the new tees, and with the new grass and the rough if you miss the fairways you get penalized. The firm greens mean you can't always go for the pins so you sometimes just have to hit your spot and try and make a 25-30-footer for birdie. The wind also swirls a little bit around here. You have to be on top of your game this week.”

Edoardo Molinari agrees.

“It's a very tough test. You have to play well with every part of your game. It just tests every part of your game and it's one of the best courses we play all year.”

Another former champion, Ernie Els, said you can't afford to miss the fairways this week. “The changes are unbelievable. The new grass they've put in is going to make it tougher. You've really got to put the ball in the fairway now because the first cut of rough is coming out with no spin. So hitting the fairway is key this week.”

Oliver Wilson is also full of praise for the new tee on the par-three 16<sup>th</sup> hole. “That new tee is very good. It makes it a much better hole. But

overall, with the new grass, you can't miss the greens because it just bounces away. You've got to be much more strategic and more accurate into the greens. This golf course is just getting better and better all the time.”

Brandon Stone believes the improvements have added a whole new dimension to the already intimidating 18<sup>th</sup> hole.

“This is the best I've ever seen the course. The greens are really quick. It's going to be a real challenge this year. The new grass will make the 18<sup>th</sup> in particular even more tricky because it's a lot harder to hold your approach on the green with it being so firm and fast.”





Ernie Els, Captain of the 2019 Presidents Cup International Team.



# INSPIRED ELS READY FOR PRESIDENTS CUP CHALLENGE

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With a week to go until the start of The Presidents Cup in Australia, the tranquility of the African bush at Leopard Creek is the perfect venue for Ernie Els to reflect on his final preparations as the International Team Captain. “It’s always special coming back to Leopard Creek,” he said of a golf course he has been around since its inception and where he won the 2005 Alfred Dunhill Championship. “I was here when they started constructing this golf course and it was the most beautiful site for a course I have ever seen,” Els said. And it’s against this backdrop of a place he so dearly loves that Els will focus his thoughts on the upcoming Presidents Cup matches against Tiger Woods’s Americans.

“I’ve been talking to the team regularly. We’ll meet up in Australia next week and start taking stock. But the guys are all very motivated and we really feel positive going into the Presidents Cup. “We’ve seen what the European Ryder Cup teams have done in the past. They’ve got the magic potion so to speak. I have spoken to some of the previous European Ryder Cup captains to get some tips from them, so we’ll see how it goes. “But we’re set now and I’ve got a nice mixture of players. I think we have 10 or 11 nations in our team. I’m really excited about this team.”

*“We’ve seen what the European Ryder Cup teams have done in the past. They’ve got the magic potion so to speak...”*



# THE NATURAL SPLENDOUR OF LEOPARD CREEK



*The European Tour Wives Association enjoyed their traditional safari outing during the Alfred Dunhill Championship and were hosted by the spectacular Jock Safari Lodge.*

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