

Leopard Creek Times

Alfred Dunhill Championship Daily News

ROUND 3, SATURDAY 30 NOVEMBER, 2019



LARRAZABAL LEADS INTO WEEKEND OF ALFRED DUNHILL CHAMPIONSHIP

Pablo Larrazabal's love for Leopard Creek shone through as he opened up a three-stroke lead over the field going into the weekend of the Alfred Dunhill Championship.

On another scorching day in the bushveld, the Spaniard signed for a round of 69 and the lead on nine under par. But three shots behind him lies 2014 champion Branden Grace, with four-time Alfred Dunhill Championship winner Charl Schwartzel seven shots back. Overnight leader Wil Besseling is also still in contention three shots off the lead. "It doesn't matter how many shots you are ahead of Charl and Branden. Charl can shoot six under on this course. This is a golf course where a four-shot swing can happen on any hole," Larrazabal said of his lead.

It is Larrazabal's deep love and admiration for this golf course and what this tournament represents that means he will never take anything for granted out here. Even when he made a double bogey on the treacherous par-three seventh – the result of a strategic error, he said – he accepted it with the respect he has for a golf course that is playing its toughest ever with the new grass laid down and the extensive improvements made to it. "You know, it's one thing to hit a bad shot, but when you make a strategic error, that's painful. I did that on seven. But then the putts on eight and nine for par were impor-

tant to keep my round going. I told myself I had a lot of birdies coming in and I took them."

He made four straight birdies from the 10th, bogeyed the 14th and then claimed it back with a birdie on 15. "It was a tough day out there. The wind was swirling and gusting, and with the tight flags it was very tough," he said. Grace agreed after his 70, taking him into the weekend on six under par.

"It was very tricky. On a grinding day like this you need to make those four- or five-foot putts for par and be happy with that, which I did. I still feel a round of six- or seven-

under is out there, but when this course has its teeth out like this you need to stay patient and experience is key."

Top-ranked South African amateur Jayden Schaper, a member of the GolfRSA National Elite squad, took full advantage of his invitation into this tournament and did well to make it through to the weekend on two over par.





Francesco Laporta.

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ITALIAN PRO LAPORTA PRAISES SUNSHINE TOUR

The Sunshine Tour has for decades lived up to its slogan of #Gr8nessBeginsHere and as the breeding ground for some of the biggest names in the history of the game. Italy's Francesco Laporta, competing in this week's Alfred Dunhill Championship, certainly agrees.

Laporta believes the Sunshine Tour should be the first choice for professional golfers looking to kickstart their careers, as it was for him when he earned his tour card at the 2013 Sunshine Tour Qualifying School before going on to secure his playing privileges on the European Tour.

"I believe South Africa is one of the best places in the world to play golf, and the Sunshine Tour is a really tough tour. Other tours need to give more opportunities to South African players to play in Europe, or to play the Challenge

Tour, or to go to the United States. Things are really great here. I gained a lot of experience here in South Africa. I learned a lot from those two years here," he said.

The support of major tournaments such as the Alfred Dunhill Championship plays a key role in the Sunshine Tour's ability to continually attract the next generation of stars to these fairways.

"The Sunshine Tour is recognised worldwide as possibly the best Tour for young professionals to hone their skills and become competitive while playing world-class golf courses all-year round and against top quality fields," said Sunshine Tour Commissioner Selwyn Nathan.

"We are a Tour of opportunity. If you can win on the Sunshine Tour, you can win on any major tour in the world."

ZANDER ZEROES IN ON ANOTHER TITLE SHOT

Zander Lombard heads into the weekend of the Alfred Dunhill Championship in contention for the third week running this summer. The South African, who finished third in this tournament last year, has been in great form and goes into today's third round at two under par. He led the Nedbank Golf Challenge hosted by Gary Player for two days before finishing tied eighth, then a week later won the Gary Player Invitational charity tournament before heading to Leopard Creek. "It's nice to still be in contention, that's why we play, but there is still a long way to go," he said. "But at least I shouldn't be too far behind going into the weekend. I tried not to force it the first two days and just to put the ball in the right position, take it shot-for-shot and hole-for-hole. I was pretty consistent and it's about knowing what pins you can go for here. "But the way my ball-striking was, I had a lot of confidence that I could put it close when I went for it, although there are some pins you can't take on. It's nice to know that you can hit a seven-iron 180 yards within a five-yard radius, it encourages you to do it."



Zander Lombard.



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THIS BEAUTY IS A BEAST

Thomas Aiken had one of the broadest smiles after a second round of 39°C heat and on a Leopard Creek course testing the professionals to their limits. The South African goes into the weekend well placed on four under par and is loving every minute of the challenge the extensive improvements to Leopard Creek are presenting this field.

“It’s like Beauty and the Beast out there because the course looks beautiful and amazing, but the pin positions are beastly,” Aiken said.

Yet it’s exactly how he prefers it to be this week.

“The rough is pretty brutal but that’s good, that’s how it should be or else everybody just plays the smash game that everyone is so tired of. The tech is too good

these days – we need to introduce spin back into the game.

“Getting spin on the ball is an art form. It’s what got me enjoying golf – watching Seve Ballesteros and Gary Player shaping the ball out of trees and bushes.

“So I hope to see spin coming back more and more into golf. You need it, especially on a course like this. This is how courses should be – firm and fast and with some rough, and then a lack of spin becomes a real problem for a golfer.”

Aiken is enjoying being competitive again following a seven-month break from the game due to his wife, Kate, suffering serious complications after the birth of their second child. He is starting the European Tour’s 2020 season

on a medical exemption.

That means the 36-year-old has seven tournaments in which to collect enough ranking points to continue playing on his previous privileges.

“It’s a weird feeling not playing for seven months, starting well and then not playing well and then being under pressure to keep your card. It’s a challenge from a mental point of view, but you’ve got to remember to just play golf. Hopefully I will do well enough to get into some sort of category that allows me to play 22 events,” Aiken said.

And a golf course such as Leopard Creek gives him the perfect opportunity to do so. “There is still a lot of golf left to be played, and I don’t think anyone is going to run away with it the way the course is playing.”



Thomas Aiken.

BESSELING STILL IN TITLE CHASE



Wil Besseling took his one-over-par 73 in the second round as a sign that he must be doing something right on a tough Leopard Creek golf course, because it was still good enough to keep him in second place going into the weekend of the Alfred Dunhill Championship.

The golfer from The Netherlands kept himself in contention on six under par on a very tricky day. “The wind was blowing in a different direction and it was stronger, and the greens were firmer. I shot one over, but as you can see I’m still lying second overall and that tells you how tough the course played,” he said.

Besseling was at seven under par playing the par-four ninth hole, his final hole of the day, and a bogey there dropped him back into a tie for second with former champion Branden Grace. But with the halfway cut falling on three over par, Besseling is more than happy with his progress on a golf course that is this year playing significantly more difficult.

“I was feeling good and felt I played well, but I couldn’t get it going. But I’m definitely looking forward to the weekend.”

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In a few years' time, South Africa will be blessed with a new doctor and a new teacher. They will help to take South Africa forward in two of the most critical fields in this country. And a golf development manager will smile, because he knows they represent the true power of golf to change people's lives.

Today the South African Golf Development Board's (SAGDB) Riverside Farm golfers will take part in the annual clinic with the professionals competing in this week's Alfred Dunhill Championship, giving them the opportunity to learn from the best in the game. And it showcases once again the important work done by the SAGDB in using golf to uplift children in disadvantaged communities throughout South Africa. Around the country, what started as the vision of Johann Rupert in

1999 to use golf as a powerful vehicle for change in disadvantaged communities is continuing to change children's lives. But beyond producing better golfers, the SAGDB's greater impact has been the role it has played in redefining what true sports transformation means. It's an impact that quietly works itself out over lifetimes. And in one particular instance, in the lives of Crystal and Riaan Beukes. The 18-year-old Crystal Beukes is in her last year with the SAGDB, having been identified and invited to join as a nine-year-old. Next

year she will head to the University of Stellenbosch to study medicine. Her brother Riaan also came through the SAGDB, and he is currently studying to become a teacher. "To have been part of the SAGDB has made a big difference in Crystal's life. She's learnt to be independent, how to get along with people of different backgrounds, and it's just made her a stronger person. Her brother Riaan started it all. He started playing golf at age seven and was part of the SAGDB and then later the Ernie Els and Fancourt Foundation. Crystal used

to follow him to the golf course, and then she started herself. The SAGDB is incredible, and they support the children 100 per cent," said their mother, Lorna Beukes. Both her children represent exactly what the SAGDB seeks to achieve, namely not just to produce better golfers, but to hopefully produce better South Africans. In describing what it takes to win Majors, Jack Nicklaus once said, "Great things require great people". And if you use golf correctly to make great people, they will do great things.

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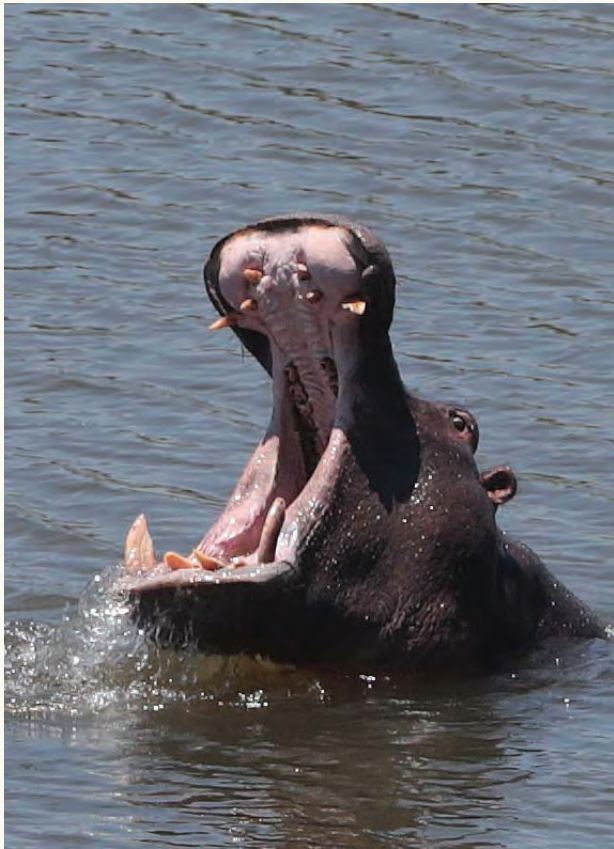
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