

# Leopard Creek Times

Alfred Dunhill Championship Daily News

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## PABLO POISED FOR LEOPARD CREEK GLORY

*Spain's Pablo Larrazabal was physically and mentally drained after a day of 48.5°C heat where he was still able to secure a three-stroke lead in the Alfred Dunhill Championship at Leopard Creek.*

“I am as tired as I have ever been,” he said after a 70 that puts him top of the leaderboard on 11 under par going into Sunday’s final round.

Dutchman Wil Besseling is his nearest challenger on eight under following a 70 of his own, while 2014 champion Branden Grace heads into the final round on seven under following a third-round 71.

It was another punishing day of heat in the lowveld that tested to the limit the golfers’ ability to focus, and Larrazabal made peace with the fact that he didn’t execute his gameplan exactly as he would’ve wanted. “I care about my gameplan. I want-

ed to shoot in the 60s and I didn’t do that. I didn’t play as well as I did in the second round, but it was solid. But you know, on this golf course you cannot be even a little bit off your game. You have to be 100% focused, and with this heat mistakes are going to happen. I have to allow for that,” he said.

But it’s a measure of how well he is playing that mistakes included, he still holds a commanding three-stroke lead on a golf course that is not going to get any easier.

“It’s going to be fun on Sunday. If I can shoot a round in the 60s, then they’ll have to come and chase me,” he said.

Besseling is hoping he can rise to the challenge of that chase. “I’ve never been in this position before in such a big tournament. But I feel confident. I’m definitely going to enjoy myself on the final day. I feel relaxed and mentally I’m in a good place,” he said.

And Grace, despite finishing with a bogey on 18 after hitting it into the water guarding the green, feels a low round is still on the cards for him.

“I know a round of four- or five-under is out there for me. It’s just a case of one or two things that need to go my way,” he said.

Grace knows better than anybody

that there is a fine balance required here at Leopard Creek between pushing for a good score and being too aggressive, and it’s something he’ll be cognizant of on the final day as he tries to catch Larrazabal.

“You can’t push too hard around here. If you push too hard it can backfire on you. But you know, I’m also trying to win. So all I can do is go out and try and shoot that round of four- or five-under and hope that something happens.”







Joel Sjöholm.

## SJÖHOLM TAKES HIS CHANCE AS SECOND RESERVE



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Sweden's Joel Sjöholm was putting together a top-class round as he reached the 16<sup>th</sup> on seven-under-par on the third day of the Alfred Dunhill Championship at Leopard Creek yesterday. A bogey on the par-three and then a double-bogey on the last saw him settle for a 68. But it was still enough to give him a massive boost from the middle of the leaderboard to a place safely in the top-10 at the end of the third round.

"You must always be satisfied with a 68, especially on one of the nicest courses in the world," was Sjöholm's response after a wayward drive out-of-bounds on the 18<sup>th</sup> had seen him drop his fourth shot in three days on the par-five finishing hole.

It was a tough finish to a round that started in spectacular fashion as he birdied five of his first six holes to start his surge up the leaderboard.

The 34-year-old is a real character – yesterday he was wearing a cap with a "Born to Bogey" motif – but he can certainly play.

"I played fantastically on the second day for my 74, it was just I had a horrible putter. I played okay

yesterday too. My game is improving, but I managed to get a lot of birdies so I could get momentum early on, especially with those five birdies in a row," Sjöholm said.

Sjöholm was second reserve for the Alfred Dunhill Championship and had to convince wife Christina that it was worthwhile undertaking the 20-hour flight to South Africa. She and their two daughters will be bowled over by just how well it is going though. Then again, Sjöholm seems to do better when he just scrapes into tournaments – his only Challenge Tour victory, in Italy in 2017, came when he was on a sponsor's invite.

"When you walk around the course every day of the week and prepare, sometimes you can be over-prepared, it can get too intense mentally. When I take up an invite or get a late call-up, I usually end up playing quite good golf. But if it was any other course than Leopard Creek, I would have thought twice about coming all this way.

"But Johann Rupert has always been very nice to me, and the worst-case scenario was that I would end up watching lions for seven days," he joked.



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## MARCUS TAKES ON THE 18<sup>TH</sup>, AND WINS

Leopard Creek's 18<sup>th</sup> hole is one of the most treacherous finishing holes in golf.

Over the years of the Alfred Dunhill Championship this daunting par five with a narrow green surrounded by water has sunk many a title hopes right there and then.

So when Englishman Marcus Armitage eagled the hole in yesterday's third round on the same day that there were six double-bogeys made on the hole, it raised a few eyebrows.

"I couldn't say no at having a go at it," said Armitage, who signed for a 71 to place him at five under at the start

of today's final round.

His decision to take on the green with his second was that much more impressive considering he'd made two bogeys in three holes before the 18<sup>th</sup>. "Look, it's a daunting hole. But it actually looks a whole lot tighter from closer to the green than back up where you play the second. I'm actually a calm golfer. I'm not an aggressive golfer at all. My strength is staying calm when things aren't going my way. So I took it on, and it came off for me. That eagle on the last certainly gives me a boost going into the final round."

## WINNING THE WAR ON PLASTIC

The Alfred Dunhill Championship and all golfers and fans have made a big contribution towards reducing single-use plastic at this year's tournament.

In a partnership between Refill Co, the global water technology company Bluewater and the Alfred Dunhill Championship, fans and golfers have been encouraged to purchase Alfred Dunhill Championship-branded glass bottles at the course, or bring their own reusable bottles, which they could refill free of charge at several points on the golf course. The various Aquifer Trailers provided purified, chilled drinking water to the golfers and spectators, while the Cube – a standalone purification system – serviced the indoor hospitality areas. All the refill solutions purified water sourced from the Crocodile River, reducing the demand on the municipal water supply. The total plastic reduced was 54 772 500ML bottles. It was a terrific effort in the drive to reduce the impact of plastic in the environment.

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# SCHAPER SHAPES UP AGAINST THE PROS



Jayden Schaper, the 18-year-old amateur playing in only his second professional tournament, confirmed his status as a rising star when he made it through to the weekend of the Alfred Dunhill Championship at Leopard Creek. The Benoni golfer, South Africa's number one ranked amateur, came through the first 36 holes at two over par, one better than the halfway cut. "I've played some solid golf and I'm just really grateful for the opportunity given to me by Mr Johann Rupert to play in my first professional event in South Africa," said Schaper. "My inexperience showed a bit because I was a bit scrappy in the first two rounds (73-73), but just making the cut means I get two bonus rounds which I'm very chuffed about." Schaper has reveled in his Leopard Creek experience. "This is one of the biggest golf tournaments for South Africans and I love Leopard Creek, having played here as an amateur a couple of times. Watching on TV, I remember Richard Sterne (2008) and Brandon Stone (2016) winning here, and playing this tournament has always been a goal of mine. Fortunately, through GolfRSA, us amateurs can get to know the course because we play it quite a bit," Schaper said after his 70

in the third round to place him on level par overall. Schaper has played in multiple Proteas teams and is in GolfRSA's National Elite squad and has won 11 tournaments in the last two years. From the start of October to mid-November he triumphed in the Ekurhuleni Open, the All-Africa Championship and the Bobby Locke Open. In August he received an invitation to play in the ISPS Handa World Invitational in Ballymena and finished tied 26th in his first go against the pros. But his greatest victory came on September 1 when he won the Junior Players' Championship at Sawgrass in the United States. That performance and Schaper looking totally at ease in one of South Africa's biggest professional tournaments shows that all is well in the pipeline, thanks to the great work done by GolfRSA. "There are so many good amateurs in this country, even though a lot of the best ones turned pro in March. But there are so many strong amateurs still coming through, which is wonderful because we push each other. Plus we get these opportunities to play in a pro event, where the course set-up is a lot more difficult. But I love how the whole tournament is run, it makes you feel quite special," Schaper said.



# SAGDB GOLFERS SHOW OFF THEIR SKILLS

*The South African Golf Development Board's (SAGDB) Riverside Farm golfers took part in their annual golf clinic with several professionals competing in the Alfred Dunhill Championship at Leopard Creek yesterday.*

The golfers form part of the Malalane Chapter of the South African Golf Development Board (SAGDB), and were given one-on-one instruction by the professionals at the spectacular National Junior Development Centre at Leopard Creek. "When you expose these youngsters to their role models at clinics such as this, it adds a massive amount to our programme," said Grant Hepburn, the CEO of GolfRSA and the South

African Golf Development Board. This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the SAGDB as the vision of Johann Rupert to use golf to change the lives of children in disadvantaged communities. "We have 70 of these projects around the country. So that gives us a nationwide footprint and all 14 golf unions support us," said Hepburn. "We have some very low handicap golfers who

are making provincial teams in their age groups." But as Hepburn points out, the work of the SAGDB is about far more than just creating professional golfers. "If we manage to produce a professional golfer, then that is certainly an achievement. But it's more important for us to develop these children as people, and golf is the perfect facilitator for that."

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# VILJOEN EYES TOP EUROPEAN TOUR FINISH

MJ Viljoen picked up a pair of consecutive birdies on each nine and dropped just one stroke as he shot an impressive three-under-par 69 in the third round to move to four-under-par and into the top-10 of the Alfred Dunhill Championship as it heads into the final round at Leopard Creek today. The 24-year-old Bloemfontein golfer is playing in just his eighth European Tour event and opening rounds of 72 and 71 saw him make his third cut. Not only is the 2019/20 season Viljoen’s most successful year on the Sunshine Tour, as he is 25<sup>th</sup> on the Order of Merit, but he is now in a great position to secure his biggest ever payday. His previous best was the R125 400 he won by

finishing 30<sup>th</sup> in the 2018 Joburg Open. Viljoen feels the improvement in his golf has been because he now has a few more “smarts” and natural talent to combine. “I’ve been working with Hendrik Buhrmann for a year now and he has been teaching me the techniques to become a world-class golfer – things like getting the clubs in the right position and hitting the ball in the right places. Talent can only take you so far and it’s that extra knowledge that is really helping me now,” he said. “I’ve had a couple of good performances before, not in big tournaments, but you still learn from them. It really does help having been in that sort of position before. I’m also working

hard on my game and now when I stray, at least I’m straying in the right direction.” Viljoen is not just satisfied being in the mix with European Tour stars like Pablo Larrazabal, Branden Grace, Charl Schwartzel and Zander Lombard, however, and he spent last night plotting how he can pull off a shock victory today. “I initially set a goal of 12-under-par because I thought that will give me a chance to win the trophy. But the course is now so tough and the wind is up, so you’ve got to hit the ball stunningly well to reach that and the scores were not that great yesterday. Plus, I only really found my swing yesterday. So I’m going to have to revise the plan a bit.”



MJ Viljoen.



Eddie Pepperell’s hat got great coverage, so to speak. The world number 47 sparked a flurry of emails to the Championship Management from interested TV viewers asking where he bought it. At the Leopard Creek Pro Shop of course. Get yours today.







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