

Norris heads logjam at windy Africa Open

Pretoria pro Shaun Norris catapulted himself into the third round lead at the R1.2-million Africa Open, where a pedigreed leaderboard promises to bring the inaugural event at the Fish River Sun to sizzling closure on Sunday.

While the easterly wind gushed up to 60km per hour and played havoc with the frustrated field on a blustery day at the Eastern Cape coastal layout, Norris delivered a controlled two-under-par 70 to move into pole position at nine-under-par 207 on Saturday.

Chasing a maiden Sunshine Tour victory, the 25-year old is one shot ahead of seasoned campaigner Marc Cayeux, and two ahead of unheralded Cullinan pro Merrick Bremner and third round leader, Jake Roos.

Cayeux, who arrived at the Fish River Sun on the back of his ninth Sunshine Tour title at the Nashua Masters a week ago, launched a feisty attack with back-to-back birdies from 14 to 16 to get himself back in the race after a rocky start to the title with a one-under-par 71. Behind the leading trio, the irrepressible Hennie Otto (68), 2006 SA number one amateur Branden Grace (69) and renowned wind player Jean Hugo (74) threaten at six-under alongside Soweto Country Club's Bafana Hlophe, who carded a 67, the low round of the day.

Norris, who was born in Johannesburg and brought up in Pretoria, learnt his golf on the predominantly wind-free courses in the area.

But the 25-year-old, unlike many of his fellow Gauteng golfers, loves to tee it up when the wind is really pumping. "I don't mind it blowing because I see it as a challenge to my shot-making skills," said Norris, who dropped only two shots, the first at the sixth hole - the toughest hole on the day - and the second at the 15th, which played downwind.

"I devised a game plan for each hole on Wednesday and I have stuck to it. The key is to play within yourself because you have to when it's blowing as hard as this," said Norris, the oldest of three brothers (Alain and Kyle are the others) who are all professional golfers. The powerfully-built professional from Silver Lakes Country campaigned - with a good deal of success - on the satellite Tarheel Tour in the United States last year, winning the 54-hole Southern Open in Charlotte, North Carolina, with an exceptional 20-under-par total of 196 that included an opening 63.

Norris left his best shot till the last hole where, downwind, he drove the green at the 337m par-4 and his ball narrowly missed hitting the flagstick before running 20 feet past the cup to set up a two-putt birdie.

Local favourite James Kamte, winner of the Dimension Data Pro-Am at Sun City a fortnight ago, is at four-under 212 alongside seven other players. That means there are 16 golfers within just five shots of each other at the top end of the leaderboard.

And to quote Stellenbosch's Hugo, 'This one is still wide open.'