

Local trio swinging for success at Africa Open

Titch Moore, Ulrich van den Berg and James Kamte will be shooting for a slice of history when they aim to become the first winner of the inaugural R1.2-million African Open, which tees off in the Eastern Cape on Thursday.

They represent the three corners of the Eastern Cape triangle fancied to be the first name on a trophy, which - with the backing of heavy-hitting sponsors Emirates airlines and Nestlife Associates - will put the Eastern Cape venue back on the golfing map.

But for Kamte, Moore and Van den Berg, it also represents something more. "When I won at Sun City, it kind of eased my mind," said the personable Kamte from Queenstown. "Sun City is a pretty tough course and if you come out and play good golf, you want to go on playing that kind of golf. This is a new tournament. My mind just wants to win."

Fresh off a plane after playing the Dubai Desert Classic, the 25-year-old could be the dark horse to watch this week.

Kamte learnt his trade, first as a caddie and then a golfer, at St Francis Bay Golf Club. He is often underestimated for his shotmaking in the wind. Add to that a confidence high after winning the Dimension Data Pro-Am and making the cut in Dubai, there's no doubt that Kamte could challenge come Sunday.

"I have great feelings coming back and playing here," said Kamte, who gave up the opportunity to play in the \$2.5-million Indian Masters in Delhi this week to tee it up at the Fish River, a haunt he knows only too well.

"I'm looking forward to get it going and if I have a chance to win on Sunday, you can bet I am going to go for it. I have great memories from this course as a junior and it would be great to do it again here," added Kamte.

East London-born Van den Berg, who carved out a 69 in today's Pro-Am, is also relishing the opportunity to add a Summer Swing title to his tally of five. "Winning the Vodacom Origins Free State and earning my European Tour card were the highlights last year, but I am looking to start the season well and I have high expectations this week," said van den Berg, based in Johannesburg these days. To be playing here in your home province is always special, all the more for playing at a course I know well and enjoy to play.

For the opening two rounds, Moore will play alongside Mark Murless and Van den Berg. Just four months ago the big-hitting Port Elizabeth pro beat Van den Berg for the Vodacom Origins of Golf Tour Final title, in what had turned into a two horse race, during the final round at St Francis Links.

"I must admit I had high expectations last week at the Wild Coast and didn't achieve them. But I have three more events to go for a Summer Swing victory. But winning here will be great, a good story - a win on home turf," said Moore, who posted a 71 in the Pro-Am today.

The Eastern Cape trio will take on a powerful line-up that will stand in their way at achieving South African golf history.

Also in the field this week are Marc Cayeux, fresh from his Nashua Masters win, eight-time Sunshine Tour winner Bradford Vaughan, who finished second last week and Kwazulu-Natal's Warren Abery. The former Nashua Masters and Telkom PGA Championship winner hit a rich vein of form on the weekend and broke through the field on Sunday to tie for third at the Wild Coast. Among the rookies there are the former 2007 top SA amateurs to watch out including Tyrone Ferreira, Louis Moolman, Oliver Bekker, Prinavin Nelson, Atti Schwartzel and Louis de Jager, who won the 2007 SA Amateur Strokeplay and Matchplay at the coastal Humewood layout.

Kamte was especially pleased to see the Africa Open draw such a strong field.

"With new sponsors in Nestlife Assurance and Emirates, who are talking about growing this event into the world-class event, it's really great to see the Sunshine Tour pros come out in a big way. There is a very positive vibe out here this week and it's wonderful for this part of the world to see the Sunshine Tour return. Hopefully other tournaments can follow," he added.