

Nelson looking for solid performance at Africa Open

Kwazulu Natal rising star Prinavin Nelson is among the hopeful starters campaigning at the inaugural Africa Open at the Fish River Sun Country Club, hoping to put his name on the trophy come Sunday. Nelson earned automatic starts into almost all of the 2008 Sunshine Tour's events when he won the Vusi Ngubeni Development Strokeplay in December, but before starting his season in January, the ambitious 20-year old set himself some high standards.

Among those, he hopes to emulate fellow Ernie Els Foundation graduate, James Kamte.

"I will give myself two years to gain experience and a level of consistency, then I aim to get myself in the Order of Merit race," said Nelson after his victory at Observatory Golf Club. "To do that you have to finish consistently in the top-five and you need to win.

"It would be nice to get back into contention, because that's the kind of level I played at the last two years, but you can't run before you walk, so I am not going to put myself under undue pressure. The first step is to make the cut every week, build up to a level of consistency."

Nelson, who attended the Umkomaas Primary School, took up golf at the age of nine. He learnt the game from his father, Nelson Nelson, starting as so many aspirant golfers do, by carrying his father's equipment around the golf course. He concentrated on soccer and cricket at school while he gradually learnt the game, but once he got his hands on some clubs and his first taste at success, the other sports lost out. The Ernie Els Foundation played a pivotal role in Nelson's career.

"With the help and support of the Ernie Els Foundation, I was able to develop as a golfer. They gave me clubs, coaching; the Foundation sponsored me to play in a lot of tournaments and guided my development," he said.

Nelson was coached by former Sunshine Tour player, John Dickson, and later joined George Harvey, with whom he still studies.

Nelson made an immediate impression in his pro debut at the European Tour co-sanctioned Joburg Open at Royal Johannesburg and Kensington, where he earned R23,958 for his 67th place tie.

"I knew the course quite well, having played a lot of amateur tournaments there but I was nervous about my first event. I was very relieved to make my first cut at Royal Johannesburg, but obviously disappointed with missing the cut in the Dimension Data Pro-Am," he said.

The KwaZulu-Natal golfer learnt just how tough the pro circuit could be when he carded a 10-over-par at the challenging Gary Player Country Club to miss the cut by six.

"It was the first time I had played at that course. It was even more difficult as I didn't get a proper practice round because of the rain before the tournament. This is where the hard work is done and I think this first year is going to be a learning curve.

Nelson also started well with solid rounds of 69-69-70 at the Nashua Masters, but paid the penalty of wayward drives in the brutal wind at the Wild Coast Sun on Sunday, signing for an expensive 78 that saw him slump to a tie for 70th.

The Scottburgh resident hopes to go one better this week at the coastal layout of the Gary Player designed Fish River Sun championship layout.

"I lost a lot of shots at the Wild Coast, but I also took away a lot of experience. The situation could be the same here if the wind gets up and the course will play quite differently than it did today. The key on Sunday was to stay patient and play each shot with precision. I got too impatient and paid the price. "But overall, the pro experience has been good. I've had a good introduction to the pro ranks and there are a lot of tournaments to come. I am gradually adjusting to the pro-circuit, because there is a big difference between the amateur and pro ranks.

"It can get quite tough and you are not really prepared for the pressure.

"At the moment I am doing well tee to green, but I let myself down around the greens. I need to work hard on pitching and putting in the coming weeks."

Nelson will get another chance to show off his shot-making skills when the R1.2-million Africa Open tees off from 7 - 10 February 2008.