

Clarke, McGinley sign up for 2010 Africa Open

Two former Ryder Cup players – Darren Clarke and Paul McGinley – can expect a warm welcome when they return to South Africa to compete in the €1-million Africa Open at East London Golf Club from 7-10 January 2010.

A regular visitor to South Africa since 1991, Clarke is no stranger to the local circuit and captured the imagination of the Eastern Cape sporting public when he challenged South Africa's Retief Goosen over the closing holes of the 2009 Africa Open.

In 2008, a tie for third at the South African Open and a fourth at the Joburg Open kick-started Clarke's return to form after two difficult years. Clarke went on to capture the BMW Asia International and added the KLM Open to take his international winning tally to 16 and finish the season ranked 13th in Europe.

Although he did not quite recapture that winning form this season, he was unlucky to miss out on the season-ending Dubai World Championship by a single spot after he finished 61st on the inaugural Race to Dubai rankings.

Fond memories of East London and a strong performance at the 2010 Africa Open could put the Ulsterman back on the winning track.

A member of the Ryder Cup side in 1997, 1999, 2002 and 2004, Clarke was picked as a wild card for the 2006 matches at the K Club. Always a formidable opponent, he produced one of his most memorable performances by winning all three of his matches. Now back in the world top-120, the Ulsterman will not only be chasing world ranking points for the Race to Dubai, but a spot in captain Colin Montgomerie's Ryder Cup side at Celtic Manor Resort in Wales next October.

"I enjoyed playing in the Africa Open last year and had a pretty good result, so I'm really looking forward to playing in East London," commented Clark. "It will be fun catching up with everyone again and hopefully this time, I'm on the winning side of the final putt."

Clarke will be joined by McGinley, who played in three successive winning sides in the Ryder Cup and holed the winning putt for Europe in 2002.

McGinley, a four-time winner on the European Tour, is also chasing hard to impress Montgomerie after captaining the Great Britain and Ireland side to victory in the 2009 Vivendi Trophy.

"It's been a few years since I won the 2005 Volvo Masters, but I am determined to break back into the top 100 in 2010 and I hope the Africa Open will give me the kind of kick start it did for Darren," said McGinley. "It's always great to start the season with a solid result and I'm looking forward to getting on the right track in East London."

The field will be further boosted by four 2009 European Tour champions in Nick Dougherty, James Kingston, Richard Sterne and Oskar Henningsson.

Britain's Dougherty captured the BMW International Open, while Henningsson from Sweden won the Moravia Silesia Open. Kingston secured his second European Tour title in a playoff triumph against Anders Hansen at the Mercedes-Benz Championship in Cologne and Sterne achieved a triple triumph by winning the Joburg Open, SA Open and Alfred Dunhill Championship in one year.

Tickets are available at the gate and entry for pensioners and children under 18 is free for all tournament days. Adults enter for free on Thursday, 7 and Friday, 8 January and tickets cost R20,00 per day on the weekend.