

East London Golf Club ready for the Africa Open challenge

The East London Golf Club course is a hugely attractive proposition at the best of times. Blend in some subtle course refinements and a €1-million purse and it is easy to understand why an intoxicating cocktail of some of the world's top golfers will be chasing a slice of success at the Africa Open from 7-10 January 2010.

The popular Links/Parklands layout confirmed its distinction as a championship venue by hosting eight national Opens since the early 1900s.

Now carrying the banner of the third European Tour co-sanctioned event on the Sunshine Tour's annual calendar, East London Golf Club brings the promise of inspiring feats, rousing shot-making and a contest to savour.

"As one of South Africa's oldest and proudest facilities, we are delighted that the Africa Open has made its home here," said general manager Brenden Fourie. "East London Golf Club has always provided an exciting and exhilarating venue and we relish this incredible opportunity for the club to extend our hospitality and to showcase Buffalo City and the Eastern Cape to our international visitors."

The Jekyll and Hyde par-73 layout which rambles through the coastal dunes, flanked by the wooded leafiness of Marina Glen and overlooking Nahoon Beach, is enchanting and beautiful on a sunny day but becomes a true test of skill and patience when exposed to the wind.

Tight fairways, elevated tees and postage stamp greens litter the front nine while wider landing areas, deep valleys and undulating putting surfaces challenge around the back.

From the par-5 first until the blind tee shot at the 18th, each hole at this risk and reward layout is unforgettable and demands strategic planning and control.

During the 2009 edition of the Africa Open, Masters Champion Angel Cabrera and five-time European Tour winner Richard Sterne moved the course record to 62 and 61 respectively in the perfect weather conditions. But the vistas of the beautiful coastline played second fiddle to the challenge of keeping the ball in play when the wind strengthened on the final day.

In spite of the tenacious grip the ongoing drought has held on the Eastern Cape, course superintendent Cameron van Niekerk is confident that the course is ready for the challenge.

"The drought has undoubtedly left its mark, but we are delighted with the progress we've made in getting the course prepared," said Van Niekerk. "Unfortunately, due to the lack of moisture, there are a few areas where the rough that hasn't come up as expected, but the players can look forward to fairways that are really tight and the greens will be even tougher this year."

Van Niekerk was also involved with the reconstruction of the championship tee at the third, as well as the bottom tee boxes at the 13th and 17th, but says the yardage gain was marginal.

"We probably gained just a couple of meters, so the course length is pretty much the same as last year," he explained. "But the overall condition of the course and the greens are better than last year and the course will provide a stern test, whether or not we have windy conditions."

"Luck will not be an element on this golf course – the guy who delivers the best round of golf on the day will take the spoils."

All in all, it will be a feast of golf with every one of the 156 competitors determined to reap a rich harvest on Sunday evening. Only one will ultimately succeed, but the chase will provide wonderful value for the spectators and television fans alike.