

Goosen to tee off 2011 at Africa Open

Retief Goosen will tee off his 2011 season at the East London Golf Club as one of the biggest stars in the Africa Open.

The double US Open winner, who took the 2009 Africa Open, missed out on his title defence last year to play in the PGA Tour's season-opening tournament winner's event in Hawaii, but declared he was ready to start the season on a high note in the Eastern Cape.

"Seeing as I missed last year, I'm coming back as a defending champion of sorts," he joked.

In 2009, Goosen posted rounds of 66-70-66 and closed with a seven-under-par 65 for a 21-under-par total of 267, beating Darren Clarke, Michael Hoey, Branden Grace and Darren Fichardt to the winner's circle by one shot.

"I like to start the season in East London. It's a great tournament and I like the golf course, which is pretty obvious after 2009. It's a good place to get the season off to a fast start."

Laid off with injury twice in 2010, Goosen still produced some solid results, including six top-five finishes and 14 top 10s worldwide. But, although he climbed three places in the official world golf rankings from his 19th place start in January, the Goose has not landed a trophy since winning the PGA Tour's Transitions Championship in 2009.

He came close to avoiding a winless year at the South African Open Championship earlier this month, but was pipped to the post by countryman Ernie Els in the final round.

"I want to get back to the winner's circle again," he said. "I came close a couple of times but didn't win at all this year. It was a consistent year and I had a chance to win quite a few tournaments, but I struggled to put together four good rounds."

"I had a few top 10 and top five finishes but there was always that one bad round that cost me a victory. My ball striking needs to improve but on the positive side, I began putting nicely.

"That's why this year was so much better and now I want to get back to winning ways."

Goosen said he will be coming to East London with a game plan to cope with the wind.

"You have to keep it low there, so I will be making sure I get that right in practice before the tournament," he said.

"I like the course because it suits my game and I like the wind. They relaid the greens after I won there in 2009 and I've heard that they are in great shape, so I'm looking forward to a good week."

Reigning British Open champion Louis Oosthuizen will make his debut in the Africa Open alongside Goosen and defending champion Charl Schwartzel.

Also joining the battle are European Tour winners Darren Clarke, Ross McGowan, Michael Jonzon, Anthony Kang and James Kingston, rising star Chris Wood, Sunshine Tour stars Branden Grace and James Kamte, as well as Thomas Aiken and Jbe Kruger, who finished second and third respectively last year.