

Oosthuizen chasing Africa Open glory

EAST LONDON (8 January 2011) - Open champion Louis Oosthuizen bogeyed the 18th hole in the third round of €1-million Africa Open at East London Golf Club, but he had done enough to secure a tie for the lead alongside Austria's Markus Brier.

The Mossel Bay professional shot a four-under-par 69 while joint overnight leader Brier dropped just one shot for a 70 to see them both on 13-under-par 206.

Charl Schwartzel is in a group of players one behind them. The defending champion got himself back in the battle with three consecutive birdies over the closing holes for a five-under-par 68 to tie for third on 12-under-par with Spain's Manuel Quiros and South Africans Jaco van Zyl and J'be Kruger.

Unheralded Quiros challenged with a 68, Van Zyl posted a bogey-free 70 and Kruger returned a nearly flawless 67 that included a run of birdies from the 13th to 16th holes.

But on a balmy day, bereft of the wind that lambasted the course for the last three days, it was the result of a triple bogey at the 16th and double at the 17th from joint overnight leader Branden Grace that left this tournament wide open.

For most of the day the 22-year-old was in charge and looked comfortable at 15 under through 15, but his run ended abruptly when he pushed his approach over the green at the par-four 16th.

"My ball was buried in the rough, probably eight to 10 inches thick," Grace explained. "I saw immediately I was dead; I didn't know how I would get a club to it. I tried to hit a lob shot but hit it under the ball twice. I was just trying to connect because if it came out of there too hard, it would have run down the length of the green. The third time I got it out but missed the putt." At the par-three 17th, Grace hooked his tee shot and it came to rest close to a tree. "I chipped it out and it stopped on the cart path. I hit a great shot from there to get it to the green but missed the putt. It would have been a good bogey if I made that putt."

Even though Grace's folly meant Oosthuizen shot to the top with Brier, the Open champion admitted that he felt frustrated throughout the day.

"It was really a tough day out there," he said. "Really, really tough; I was really disappointed with the weather. We adjusted ours swings to the wind for three days, suddenly there is no wind. It takes a while to adjust again.

"I really thought someone would run away with it, but I guess it's wide open."

Most of his frustration was caused by the putter, though. "I hit a couple of good putts, but also some really bad ones. I just couldn't get any consistency going. Hopefully the putter warms up by tomorrow morning and the wind returns; then I should be in with a chance."

Schwartzel also struggled with his putter, but the defending champion got it going over the closing holes. "It was an absolutely perfect day for golf and I took advantage; I hit the ball really well, but the putts didn't exactly drop," he said. "But I had a bonus, I finished nicely and kept myself in it."