

## **Pieters takes early poll at Africa Open**

Brandon Pieters brushed aside three bogeys on Thursday to take the early first round lead of the Africa Open as he carded a seven-under-par 66 around the 6,104-metre (6,674-yard) par-73 East London Golf Club.

He made eight birdies and an eagle to take a one-stroke lead over Jaco van Zyl, Frenchman Jean-Baptiste Gonnet and England's Miles Tunnicliff as the wind got up over the course after an early delay as coastal fog descended and reduced visibility.

His eagle three came on the 11<sup>th</sup> as he played a seven-iron approach to within four feet. It came early in his round – in East London, the players starting on the second half of the course begin at nine instead of 10 – and he followed it with a birdie on 12.

But the bogeys began immediately thereafter – they came on 13, 15 and 18 – and the only saving Grace for Pieters was that they were interspersed with birdies on 14 and 16. “It was really just bad driving,” said Pieters. “With the rough up, it’s difficult to recover from a wayward tee shot, but for the rest, I was happy with my game.

He joined the chorus of players praising the greens. “It’s always all about putting,” he said, “and I didn’t really miss anything from inside 10 feet today.”

That helped him make five birdies in a row from the third to the seventh: “all good putting, that’s all,” he said.

Tunnicliffe made just a single drop in his round when he bogeyed the 14<sup>th</sup> after starting on the ninth, but his five birdies and eagle more than made up for that.

Gonnet also made bogey on 14, as well as on nine, and six birdies and an eagle.

Van Zyl was flawless. The man who won four titles on last year’s Sunshine Tour and earned his European Tour card at the Q-School in Spain in December made six birdies and never looked in any kind of danger.

“I only missed one fairway all day,” he said, “and that was only just.”

Defending champion Charl Schwartzel had an afternoon tee time, while 2009 champion Retief Goosen finished on two-over.