

New look Fancourt awaits Senior stars

A new look Links at Fancourt will await the leading European Senior Tour players when they visit South Africa for the first time from next year for the inaugural Berenberg Bank Masters.

Already considered one of the world's premier golfing destinations, the Gary Player-designed course has undergone some major reconstruction work in recent months, including the resurfacing of the greens and resculpturing of 27 bunkers.

The decision to resurface all 18 greens with A4 bent grass was taken to address the presences of poa annua. As a result of the faster greens, subtle changes were made to the contours on five of the greens (holes one, two, three, ten and 12) to create more level surfaces around the hole.

The renovation of the bunkers, to give them a consistent sod wall style throughout the course, included introducing firm sand to improve playability and ensures their greater visibility from tee boxes to create a more spectacular visual effect on the course.

All of the changes to the course were made under the watchful eye of Frank Henegan, senior design consultant for the Player Group, to ensure they are in line with the original concept created by the nine time Major Championship winner, who will be part of the field for the Berenberg Bank Masters from March 26-28.

It should ensure the already iconic Links at Fancourt is in immaculate condition when the leading Senior Tour players visit in March.

Player's original design opened in 2000 and has hosted the Presidents Cup in 2003, the inaugural Women's World Cup of Golf in 2005, and the South African Open Championship on The European Tour in 2006, which was won by another home favourite Retief Goosen.

Situated in the heart of the Garden Route, the majestic Outeniqua mountains will provide a stunning backdrop for the inaugural Berenberg Bank Masters, which will be broadcast to an international television audience.

There will be a strong international presence in the field, with stars such as Peter Mitchell, Costantino Rocca and Sam Torrance having all played in the annual Gary Player Invitational at Fancourt over the past nine years.

South African John Bland, who is attached to Fancourt, will spend the close season break adjusting to the changes made to the Links having captured his second European Tour victory at the Bad Ragaz PGA Seniors Open in August. That victory came 13 years and 313 days after he captured his maiden title in the London Masters during his rookie season in 1995 and made him the second oldest Senior Tour champion – behind Neil Coles – at the age of 63 years old.

Bland was instrumental in attracting the Senior Tour to Fancourt and he will be keen to produce a strong home challenge, having already won 20 times in South Africa.

He said: "I am very excited to be part of the first international Senior Tour event in South Africa.

“The Berenberg Bank Masters will no doubt add to the list of prestigious tournaments that have been played on The Links at Fancourt, which is a fantastic golf course designed by my good friend, Gary Player.

“I look forward to showing my buddies on the Tour with whom I have played for many, many years the wonderful resort of Fancourt and the Garden Route. I feel really privileged to call this part of the world my home.

“My sincere gratitude goes to Dr. Hans-Walter Peters and his partners at Berenberg Bank for sponsoring the event. It will be a great opportunity for both the Fancourt members and golfing enthusiasts in South Africa to watch some of the world’s greatest golfing legends in action.”

Bland and Player will head an impressive cast of South African players who will be hoping the event can be a launch pad to a season of similar success to 2009.

In addition to Bland’s victory in Switzerland, Bertus Smit landed the biggest pay day of his career by holding off former Ryder Cup Captain Ian Woosnam to win the Ryder Cup Wales Seniors Open, a result which has kept him inside the top ten on the Order of Merit for much of the season.

Smit gained his card at last November’s Senior Tour Qualifying School, where he finished second behind Jimmy Heggarty of Northern Ireland, and fellow graduate and compatriot Chris Williams has also enjoyed a fine 2009.

Williams finished tied second on his debut in the De Vere Collection PGA Seniors Championship and has two other top five finishes in his six appearances so far, along with an impressive top 30 finish in The Senior Open Championship presented by MasterCard.

They will all be hoping that the event can help develop golf in their home land, with the event co-sanctioned by the Sunshine Tour.

For the Senior Tour it is yet another new destination, with the 2010 season beginning with a first visit to Mauritius in December after inaugural visits to Brunei and Mallorca 2009.

Andy Stubbs, Managing Director of the European Senior Tour, said: “The Berenberg Bank Masters over The Links at Fancourt is certain to be one of the premier events on the 2010 Senior Tour season.

“We will have a truly global field of senior golfers, led by Links designer Gary Player and Fancourt’s own John Bland, and the course will provide a wonderful test for them.

“The changes to The Links at Fancourt will no doubt enhance the already spectacular course, which has already hosted a number of major events, and we look forward to experiencing the hospitality of Fancourt.

“The Senior Tour would like to acknowledge the vision of Dr Hasso Plattner, the owner of Fancourt, in creating, with Gary Player, one of the most iconic golf courses in the world. We also acknowledge the vision of Berenberg Bank for creating this new event on the Senior Tour and we all look forward to entertaining the guests of Berenberg Bank in such splendid five star surroundings.”

Dr Hans-Walter Peters, Chairman of the 1590-founded German Berenberg Bank, said: “We are very happy to be sponsor of the first Senior Tour event in South Africa. Our clients and guests are looking forward to coming to Fancourt as one the world’s most famous golf destinations and to play the iconic Links course.”