

ALFRED DUNHILL
CHAMPIONSHIP

Leopard Creek Times

ROUND 2

FRIDAY 14 DECEMBER 2018



Photo Credit: Carl Fourie.

Bekker Leads at Leopard Creek

Oliver Bekker took advantage of a magnificent afternoon on the Leopard Creek course and signed for a six-under-par 66 to lead the Alfred Dunhill Championship by one stroke after the first round.



*Dimitrios Papadatos of Australia during day one of the Alfred Dunhill Championship.
Photo Credit:Stuart Franklin/Getty Images*

by Michael Vlismas

The South African had an afternoon draw and benefitted from a drop in the wind that had unsettled the morning field. Bekker's four birdies in his first five holes on the back nine in particular gave him the edge over his nearest challenger Dimitrios Papadatos of Australia on five under.

"We had the better side of the draw because the wind dropped completely. I'm glad to have been able to take advantage of that," said Bekker.

Defending champion Brandon Stone teed off in the morning wind and was very pleased with his three-under-par 69.

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Louis Oosthuizen also felt he had to work really hard for his one-under-par 71 in the morning conditions.

Former champion Branden Grace did well to fight his way back from being four over at one point to a finish of one-over-par 73.

And two other former champions in Charl Schwartzel and Ernie Els also came through the opening day at one over par.

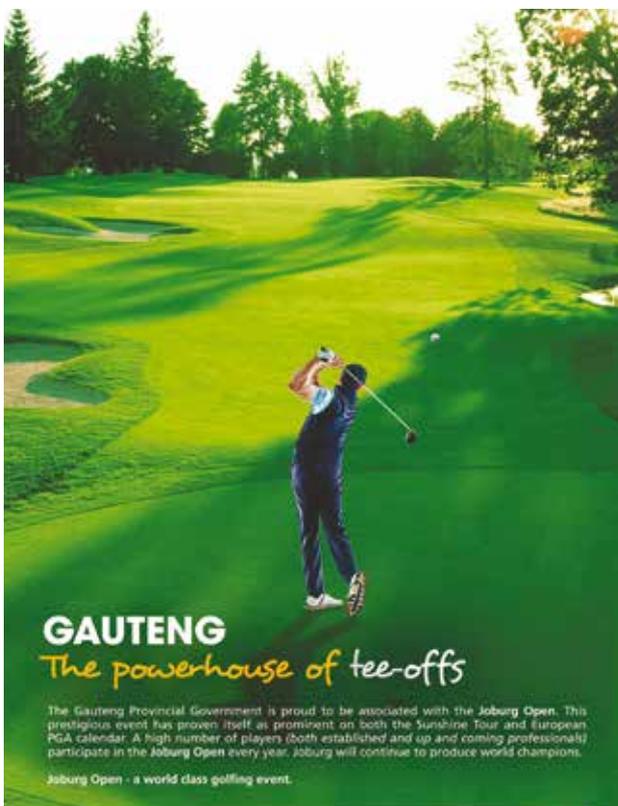
But the combination of the calmer afternoon conditions and changes to the Leopard Creek course worked perfectly for Bekker as he leads this prestigious championship only a few days after securing his Web.com Tour card for next season.

"I hit the ball really well all day. In particular, I drove it well so I was on the fairway most of the time, which meant I could control my ball into these firm greens. I just played solid golf," he said.

"The changes to the course are clearly good for my game. I've never really played that great here in the past, but I felt like it now suits my game a little bit better." ■

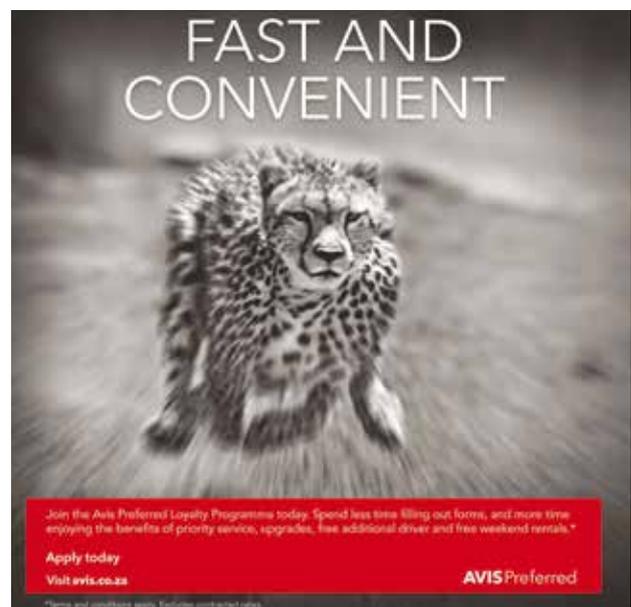
"The changes to the course are clearly good for my game."

- Oliver Bekker.



Oliver Bekker lines up a putt during day one of the Alfred Dunhill Championship.

Photo Credit: Stuart Franklin/Getty Images.





Stone 'massive fan' of revamped course

It mattered little to defending champion Brandon Stone that he was playing on a "new" golf course as the 25-year-old hit the ground running at Leopard Creek on Thursday with an excellent three-

under-par 69 in the first round of the Alfred Dunhill Championship. With the changes to the course certainly making it more of a challenge for the pros, with a tricky breeze also adding to the difficulty,

Stone's score was good enough for a place in the top-10 and the three-time European Tour winner just seemed to pick up from his final-round 66 in the South African Open last weekend. "It's obviously quite special

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being the defending champion, but any time you come back to Leopard Creek is fantastic and the changes have made it even better. I loved this course before but now I'm a massive fan, it's the Holy Grail of golf because it's made it easier for the average guy, which we need as we try to grow our game. It's more fun to play and the average golfer is not going to be out of breath and have sunstroke when he gets back to the clubhouse.

"I'm also very happy with how my game feels, I was able to build on the confidence of the SA Open, the swing I found, and I hit the ball so well today that I gave myself lots of good looks from between 10 and 20 feet, but I struggled a bit with my putter. But to shoot 69 was fantastic, it was a great first round that I hope to build on," Stone said.

While the famous Leopard Creek experience is now going to be a little easier for the average club golfer,

Stone said there is a lot more danger lurking for the professionals teeing it up the Alfred Dunhill Championship. "The bunkers are now more in play for us because they have been pushed much further back, like on eight, but I wasn't going to fall for Mr Rupert's trap there, I think I got one up on him because I didn't go for it. They've also taken bush out of the sides of the fairway but every hole seems to get narrower, like a Christmas tree, as you approach the greens, which are superb but difficult to hold.

"Plus there was a really tricky breeze, a lot of crosswinds, and it was gusty at times. So a hole like seven is very tough, it should be a par-four!

The wind was off the left today and the pin was tight to the water on the right. I ran through the green and over and had a bad lie, but I wasn't really disappointed to make four there," Stone said of the par-three 195-yard



Brandon Stone.
Photo Credit: Stuart Franklin/Getty.

seventh, where he made his only bogey of the day. ■

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Charl Schwartzel.
Photo Credit: Stuart Franklin/Getty.



Facts & Figures

1 The third round of the 2007 Alfred Dunhill Championship yielded two holes-in-one. Dutch professional Joost Luiten aced the par-three 12th hole, his first in a tournament. It was an incredible stroke of luck for Luiten, who made the halfway cut right on the mark of two over par. And English professional Oliver Wilson scored a hole-in-one on the par-three 16th, winning himself 190 cases of Terra Del Capo wine.

Keith Horne.



2 In 2012, Keith Horne scored holes-in-one on the par-three 12th hole two days in succession. Horne aced the hole in Friday's second round and Saturday's third round, using the same club for both – an eight iron. And in Sunday's final round, Magnus Carlsson scored a hole-in-one, also on the par-three 12th.



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Garth Mulroy.
Photo Credit: Stuart Franklin/Getty.



3 Garth Mulroy's triumph in the 2011 Alfred Dunhill Championship at Leopard Creek made him the 100th South African to win in European Tour history.

5 Charl Schwartzel has won a record four Alfred Dunhill Championship titles in 2004, 2012, 2013 and 2015. He has also finished runner-up four times.

4 Only two golfers have ever won back-to-back Alfred Dunhill Championship titles: Pablo Martin in 2009 and 2010, and Charl Schwartzel in 2012 and 2013.

6 The biggest margin of victory in the tournament is 12 strokes by Charl Schwartzel in 2012. That year he also set the tournament scoring record of 24 under par 264. ■



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