

Africa Amateur Championship

Quick Quotes

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Altin van der Merwe



R&A
AFRICA AMATEUR
CHAMPIONSHIP

Q. Let's start with where you first got into golf. What do you remember or what first got you into the game of golf?

ALTIN VAN DER MERWE: I started playing golf probably when I was seven years old with my dad, just whacking around hitting clubs on the range with me and my dad and his brother, so my uncle I would say. Obviously then he bought me a PC game which Tiger Woods, was obviously a fan. I only played Tiger Woods. Basically analyzed the swing on the laptop and tried to mimic it on the range, and from there we went.

Q. So that was Tiger Woods on PlayStation?

ALTIN VAN DER MERWE: 100 per cent, all Tiger Woods.

Q. Can you tell us what you love about golf. What's the thing about golf that attracts you?

ALTIN VAN DER MERWE: It used to be just playing golf and practising and getting to hit different shapes, different shots. At my age I've hit all the shots. I've hit all the trajectories, the spin, and every part of the game. But now it's all about the pressure and the rush feeling I get. That's what I love about golf the most. Competition golf I would say.

Social golf I actually just hack around and try and have as much fun as I can with my friends, but other than that, I don't really play alone because it's boring now. But yeah, competition golf, that's what gets me going.

Q. How important is this championship in particular, the new Africa Amateur? How important is it not only for you and your progression but everyone in the continent, as well?

ALTIN VAN DER MERWE: I would say the importance of this tournament brings all African nations together. Every country -- I've heard about countries that I didn't even know existed. I didn't even know they could play golf. We've been to Malawi last year and seen that the guys can play a little bit. Obviously needs a bit of work if there's more development there, they can grow the game of golf just as

well as South Africa. But I think it brings golf in Africa together also with the diversity, so that's always a good thing when it comes to South Africa.

Q. You're a member of the Ernie Els Foundation, as well. How important is that for you and your career?

ALTIN VAN DER MERWE: Yeah, the Ernie Els Foundation has helped me. I would say they dug me out of a hole I would say three years ago. I wanted to go to Q-school in 2021, and then they offered me membership when I was 24. I was the oldest member offered membership, and obviously I'm not going to turn it down. They've spent a lot of money and efforts, and I would say helped me a lot through the last three years. Without them I would say I would not be here.

Q. What are the ambitions? Are there ambitions to turn pro? What's the next goal?

ALTIN VAN DER MERWE: Yeah, the manager, I've known him for a long time, of the Ernie Els Foundation. He basically offered me the membership. He could see I'm not ready.

Deep down I believed I was ready, but if I look back now, I'm actually glad I didn't make it because I would have struggled. I would say I wasn't ready for pro golf or for pressure golf. But coming through the last three years and playing more golf and playing higher and more important competitions, going to the UK, going overseas has helped me a lot with the pressure type of golf that you have to play in to stay calm under pressure.

Q. Is the pro ranks close?

ALTIN VAN DER MERWE: Yeah, I'm going to Q-school in April. Luckily I'm going straight through second stage, so that's final stage, so we'll see what happens.

Q. Who inspires you as a player, as a golfer or even as a person?

ALTIN VAN DER MERWE: That's easy (indiscernible).

Q. What about outside of golf? What do you get up to outside of golf? What ticks your boxes?



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ALTIN VAN DER MERWE: Outside of golf, I would say when I'm back home, I've got a fiance, and I'm not a golfer anymore. So marriage is around the corner, as well. I love all sports.

I would say me and my half brother go mountain climbing a lot. Not climbing but hiking. I'm very fitness freak, as well. Cricket, as well. Rugby I had to give up a long time ago because of injury and stuff like that. But basically any sport in general. And then I can party now and again.

Q. What are your thoughts on Leopard Creek? What do you like about the course and how do you think the challenge will be this week?

ALTIN VAN DER MERWE: Look, I've played here a couple times. I would say four to five tournaments. I think this is the fifth year in a row. This course, it's got a different grass than what we're used to. I think this is Bermuda. It's not Kikuyu; that's all we know. That's what we're used to.

Aside from Fancourt, this is I would say the best facility we have in South Africa, and they have got everything: The biggest practice facility, chipping greens, pitching greens. They even have a par-3 course, which I know every player here loves to play. So we get excited even if we go to the par-3 course, never mind the golf course.

But yeah, the golf course, some tee shots on some holes are pretty scary, which brings the best out of you and the worst out of you, so it's just a true test of golf.

Q. I'd be remiss not to talk about last week. You won in a playoff. Can you talk about the emotions? You must be running high on confidence, as well. Maybe we need to mention that chip-in, as well.

ALTIN VAN DER MERWE: Yeah, last week it was the Golf RSA International Open. I had a good week starting the week in Jan, and then the two events after that, had a crack at it in Durban and actually just threw it away on the last nine holes I would say, and then the SA Am was absolutely terrible. I almost played 18, and I haven't done that in the last four years.

That was actually a big wake-up call, and I went to the range for six to seven hours five days straight before I went to this tournament. Took a nice break one day and just played.

Then the last day I told myself I had to play 8- or 9-under, and I ended up playing 8-under, 64, and got me in a playoff. The shot out of the bunker was just -- it's actually something new Christiaan Maas taught me when we were

in Abu Dhabi for the Eisenhower, and he taught me to open up my club face horizontally or vertically on the ground. It feels like you're going to shank the ball out of the bunker, and he just says, just swing through it, and it's that shot I've practised over and over again. That's the shot I hit. I must thank Maasy for that, as well

Q. What's it like for you as one of the top-ranked players in this field competing against people like Christiaan Maas? There's a few battles within a battle here.

ALTIN VAN DER MERWE: Yeah, there's definitely a couple battles between friends this week. We don't really know the other African nation golfers, so we don't know what they're going to bring to the table, but we're going to play the course as we always do.

We've seen the scores in the previous African Amateurs that we've shot, so obviously there's a number that we try and chase, depending on weather, of course, and the players. But you'll definitely see some camaraderie out there between friends, and it's mostly of our top players, but there are some good players around here amongst me, some good friends like Maasy, like Jordan, like Ivan. You'll see some friendly competition at the start, and at the end it'll get a bit more serious.

Q. What would it mean to lift up the trophy, the first ever Africa Amateur?

ALTIN VAN DER MERWE: That would be absolutely awesome. It's like a dream come true for me as an amateur. British Am would have been nice, as well, but those guys are really good. We tried our best out there, and Christo prevailed, but the rest of us felt just as lucky, but this is the closest we're going to get. This is probably the biggest tournament in South Africa for us and for Africa as a whole. With the prize you're getting, we're all playing for that spot.

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