

St Francis Links ranked in top 2 of Vodacom Origins of Golf 2018

By Michael Vilasas

St Francis Links occupies a special place among South Africa's top golf courses that are hosting the 2018 Vodacom Origins of Golf series.

St Francis Links and Arabella Country Club are the highest ranked on the 2018 series, which lead off at Zebula Country Club in August and also includes Selborne Park Golf Club in KwaZulu-Natal, Parys Golf and Country Estate in the Free State and Pinnacle Point on the Garden Route on its schedule.

The series is in its 15th season as the Sunshine Tour's most successful continuous series of tournaments in its history.

This year the popular pro-am series, which offers total prize money worth R4.8 million and which has grown its sponsorship footprint to also include African Bank, Celcom, Apexon and Titleist as partners, is being played on some of the most spectacular golf courses in the country, with two of the six ranked within the top 10 in South Africa.

The 2018 series also has its own Order of Merit and a new incentive for the professionals. The Heritage Resorts Order of Merit will reward the leading professional at the end of the series with a seven-night stay at Heritage Le Telfair in Mauritius, including flights.



The professionals will need to play at least four of the six Vodacom Origins of Golf tournaments to qualify.

This year's series plays a key role in the build-up to the Sunshine Tour's international season at the end of the year. The AfrAsia Bank Mauritius Open - sanctioned by the European Tour Sunshine Tour and Asian Tour - will be the first tournament played after the Vodacom Origins of Golf Final in November.

Since its debut on the Sunshine Tour in

2004, the Vodacom Origins of Golf series has grown to become the backbone of the winter leg of the Tour.

This was the series that launched the professional career of Major winner Louis Oosthuizen, who won his first professional tournament on the Vodacom Origins of Golf in 2004. And when Brendan Grace won five times during his breakthrough season in 2012, one of those titles came on the Vodacom Origins of Golf series.



A Network of Relationships

Throughout its 15-year history, the Vodacom Origins of Golf series has excelled in allowing Vodacom to network with its most valued customers, and for them in turn to learn more about Vodacom.

"We have C Level executives that join us at these tournaments and it allows us to build relationships with our existing customers while we also have prospective customers joining us, which helps us to understand their business better. It's rare you can spend three days with your top clients and we see the business returns on this," says William Mzimba, Chief Officer Vodacom EDU. For Craig McIntyre, MD of Franke South Africa, the tournaments offer a unique opportunity of interaction.

"We have a long relationship with

Vodacom developing solutions for our business, and most importantly cost-effective solutions. These events give us the opportunity to more openly discuss solutions to the challenges business have."

Jonathan Naidoo, CEO of SmartXChange, can also attest to the strength in relationships these tournaments foster.

"Vodacom is one of my founding partners. They sit on my board and help tremendously in developing start-up companies in the ICT space. It's an absolute pleasure working with them as a strategic partner, and I also want to congratulate the Vodacom Foundation for their contribution to the child agenda at these events through raising money for the African Children's Feeding Scheme."



By The Numbers

1 - Patrick O'Brien was the first winner of the first Vodacom Origins of Golf tournament in 2004.

11 - The number of Vodacom Origins of Golf titles Jean Hugo has won, a record for the series.

3 - Only three Sunshine Tour professionals have managed to win three of the six Vodacom Origins of Golf tournaments in one season. They are Thomas Aiken (in 2004), Brandon Pieters (in 2009) and Jean Hugo (in 2011).

29 - In the second round of the 2011 Vodacom Origins of Golf at Sishan Golf Club, Chris Swanepoel shot a front nine

of 29 that started with an eagle two on the first.

61 - In 2010, Brandon Stone teed it up as an amateur in the Vodacom Origins of Golf Final at Cubana and shot an 11-under-par 61 in the second round.

44 - Rossouw Louber won twice on the Vodacom Origins of Golf series in 2006 and in what was his rookie season on the Sunshine Tour. At the age of 44 he was the oldest Sunshine Tour rookie. 200 - The Vodacom Foundation donates R200 for every birdie made by an amateur or professional during the programs of the Vodacom Origins of Golf to the African Children's Feeding Scheme.

