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Keeper masters the greens

2009/01/14

THIS week's big golf events scheduled for the East London Golf Club (ELCG) have been a huge challenge to its staff in general – and for one person in particular.

Greenkeeper Cameron van Niekerk, 30, considers the Pro-Am tournament that starts today and the four-day African Open that starts tomorrow, as a real challenge, but is confident the greens will play well and that the players in the two competitions will be satisfied with them over the next five days.

Over the past few months Van Niekerk has been hard at work ensuring the greens are in shape for this week's events.

Some time back there had been a number of complaints from members and visiting players about the state of the greens, and, with the Africa Open awarded to East London, a decision was made by management last year to replace the grass on the greens with seawarf paspalum – a hardy grass from America and used extensively at golf courses and bowls rinks.

To Van Niekerk's joy, the new grass worked well and the greens are at present in excellent condition. "We're the only course in South Africa with all 18 greens made from seawarf paspalum," said Van Niekerk.

He has had encouraging feedback from members on the revival, ranging from "perfect" to "outstanding".

The General manager of the ELGC, Brenden Fourie, has nothing but heartfelt praise for Van Niekerk, whom he said had worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the big tournament.

Van Niekerk who was educated in Durban, thoroughly enjoys working outdoors and has been involved with various golf courses throughout South Africa for about 12 years, including Arabella, Woodhill, the Durban Country Club and Beachwood.

"What I love about my job is that every day is challenging, and always different," Van Niekerk said.

"The weather plays a big role, of course, but the greens are a living canvas, everything is constantly changing.

"There are weekly cycles, monthly cycles, seasonal cycles, and planning ahead is most important," Van Niekerk emphasised. He confirmed that the greens were expected to run at a good speed during the two tournaments. "The green speed is on track and should be above 8.5," Van Niekerk said with confidence.

"I don't think there will be any complaints about the greens from the players this weekend," he added with a smile. - By PETER MARTIN



LOOKING GOOD: East London Golf Club Greenkeeper Cameron van Niekerk, inspects the fairway in preparation for the African Open that starts tomorrow, as well as for the Pro-Am which tees off today. Picture: ALAN EASON

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