



OFFICIAL

EVENT PROGRAM















INSPIRING THROUGH THE POWER OF SPORT

ISPS HANDA is proud to be the title sponsor of the ISPS HANDA Australian Open, bringing together our national men's and women's Open events at the same time as our incredible All Abilities Championship.

ISPS HANDA has partnered with many tours and golfing bodies around the world, to use the power sport has to change the world.

In Australia, we have worked extensively with both Golf Australia and the PGA Tour of Australasia to break down cultural barriers and unite communities through golf.

We wish the players the best of luck for the tournament and thank them for highlighting what the *power of sport* can achieve.

www.ispsgolf.com



Dr. Haruhisa Handa ISPS FOUNDER AND **CHAIRMAN**



Enda Kenny PATRON AND FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF **IRELAND**



Minjee Lee AMBASSADOR AND PROFESSIONAL GOLFER



Richie McCaw AMBASSADOR AND FORMER ALL BLACK **CAPTAIN**

ISPS HANDA













A MESSAGE FROM THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT

Pelcome to Melbourne for the 2024 Australian Open!

When we say we're the sporting capital, visitors tend to think of the MCG. But what makes us the centre for sporting and major events in Australia is the diversity of our world-class venues.

The Melbourne Sandbelt is home to some incredible golf courses, setting the stage to showcase the best of the sport, and the best of Victoria.

And this year's Australian Open is particularly special. This year marks the 120th anniversary of the first men's event and the 50th anniversary of the first women's tournament held in Victoria.

Players in the men's, women's and allabilities championship will tee off on the same two courses, at the same time. It's an innovative approach that will create a fantastic atmosphere for spectators, both on the course and watching around the globe.

If you're visiting our great state, make sure you explore all that we've got to offer. Melbourne's CBD is home to world-class dining experiences, hidden bars, rooftop vistas and more. Or keep heading down the coast to the Mornington Peninsula – or across the bay to the Great Ocean Road.

Our government is proud to partner with Golf Australia to bring the Australian Open to life. Congratulations to everyone who has worked so hard to make this event a success.

Best of luck to all the players, and have a wonderful time in Victoria.

Hon. Jacinta Allan Premier of Victoria

A MESSAGE FROM GOLF AUSTRALIA

t is one of the great privileges in my role to welcome everyone to the 2024 ISPS HANDA Australian Open on behalf of Golf Australia.

The Australian Open is one of the sport's great historic titles, and will once again be delivered this year in partnership with the Challenger PGA Tour of Australasia, WPGA Tour of Australasia and DP World Tour.

To be hosting the event on the world-famous Melbourne Sandbelt once more, and especially at two of the world's finest courses in Kingston Heath Golf Club and The Victoria Golf Club, is tremendously exciting.

These venues are steeped in history, worldwide acclaim and have played a significant role in attracting the fantastic fields that will challenge for the Stonehaven Cup, Patricia Bridges Bowl and Australian All Abilities Championship.

The combination of top-class golfers playing on world-renown courses is a tantalising prospect for all of us. Golf

fans are sure to turn out in their droves to both host venues, and will also have the option of taking in the action via Foxtel and the Nine network, as well as globally through the DP World Tour media network.

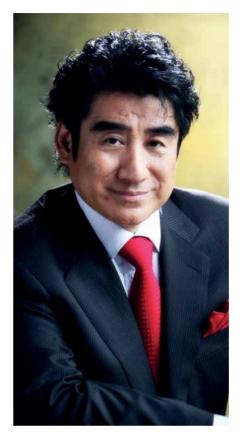
On behalf of Golf Australia, our sanctioning partners, the players and fans, I would like to thank the members and staff of Kingston Heath and Victoria for welcoming this great championship, as well as our commercial partners, in particular title sponsor ISPS HANDA.

Victoria is a brilliant golf destination, and the Victorian Government continues to be a great supporter of our sport and major golf events. We are grateful to the government, and the team at Visit Victoria, for their role in bringing the Australian Open back to the Sandbelt.

Here's to another memorable, competitive ISPS HANDA Australian Open.

James Sutherland Chief Executive, Golf Australia





WELCOME TO THE ISPS HANDA AUSTRALIAN OPEN

t is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2024 ISPS HANDA Australian Open Championship, hosted at the outstanding Kingston Heath and The Victoria golf clubs. This marks our third time as title sponsor of this iconic event, which continues to be revered for its rich history and its legacy of distinguished champions.

Our partnership with Golf Australia, however, dates back much further, beginning in 2010 with the ISPS HANDA Women's Australian Open Championship, a relationship we proudly maintained until the 2020 event, before the global disruption caused by COVID-19. We are thrilled to continue our enduring relationship with Golf Australia, united by a shared vision to harness the power of sport to create meaningful change in our communities.

At ISPS HANDA, we are deeply committed to improving access to sport for people with disabilities and maximise

the ways that sport can improve their lives and create opportunities. We are immensely proud to be the title sponsor of the ISPS HANDA Australian All Abilities Championship, a role we have held since the first event in 2018. We firmly believe golf deserves a place in the Paralympic Games, and we hope our championship can play a positive role in achieving this.

For more than 30 years, I've had the privilege of supporting golf in Australia and witnessing firsthand its positive impact. Golf plays such an important role in transforming lives, impacting communities around the world, and bringing people together, as well as making Australians healthier and happier.

To the players competing in this year's championship, I wish you every success.

Dr Haruhisa Handa Founder and chairman, ISPS HANDA

WELCOME TO THE AUSTRALIAN ALL ABILITIES CHAMPIONSHIP

The Australian All Abilities
Championship celebrates its fifth
birthday this year as we prepare to watch
the world's best all-abilities players take
on the magnificent Kingston Heath
course on the famed Melbourne Sandbelt.
It promises to be a very special event.

In the past four stagings, we have seen how important this championship is in inspiring the next generation of people with a disability to play golf – a sport for all Australians. There are countless stories of new golfers who have taken up the game because they saw what was possible by watching the AAAC either in person, on television or online.

This year we will witness another first – an Australian defending the title. Lachlan Wood became our first home winner last year with a three-shot victory. Wood leads the local challenge, which

includes Wayne Perske, Steven Alderson and Cameron Pollard, the trio sharing titles across the country in the past year.

After making a winning debut in our event in 2022, the world No.1, England's Kipp Popert, returns to Australia. He will be joined by world No.2 Simon Lee from Korea, who makes his AAAC debut.

Thank you to our partners ISPS HANDA and Visit Victoria for your ongoing support of the AAAC, assisting our efforts to help even more people with a disability to enjoy the game of golf.

You can't be what you can't see, and I look forward to the positive impact this championship will have on inspiring the next generation of all-abilities golfers.

Christian Hamilton Head of Programs & Inclusion, Golf Australia



4 OFFICIAL PROGRAM OF 2024 ISPS HANDA AUSTRALIAN OPEN 5



A MESSAGE FROM KINGSTON HEATH GOLF CLUB



Mingston Heath has a rich tournament where strategy off the tee is at a premium to ensure the optimum angle of approach. to be adding to by co-hosting the 2024 Men's and Women's ISPS HANDA Australian Open events, along with the Australian All Abilities Championship.

In 2022, we co-hosted all three events with The Victoria Golf Club, with the roles reversed this time around and Kingston Heath taking on the main hosting duties this year. This will be the ninth time our club has hosted an Australian Open Championship (men's and women's), and the first time hosting the All Abilities Championship.

We are excited that both champions from 2023 will be returning to defend their titles, with Ashleigh Buhai looking to make it three in a row. Joaquin Niemann showed his putting class last year, something which will be required again on both Kingston Heath and Victoria's famed greens. We are very much looking forward to watching how all competitors approach 'Sandbelt' golf, to ensure the optimum angle of approach.

Since we last co-hosted, the club was proud to be named as the host venue for the 2028 Presidents Cup, a testament to our championship course being built to stand the 'test of time'. While we have added some length to certain holes with additional tournament tees over the years, the footprint out there now is relatively unchanged since the first tee shot was struck on our Cheltenham site in 1925.

Volunteers play a huge role in the success of any event, and these championships are no different, with more than 900 being recruited across both venues. We thank every one of them for giving up their time, along with thanking the members of both clubs for giving up what some would consider their second homes, to allow the world's best golfers to compete in our great city.

Stephen Montfort Captain

A MESSAGE FROM THE VICTORIA GOLF CLUB

o all members of The Victoria Golf Club, I hope you all feel as proud as I do, that again Golf Australia has chosen our fabulous club to play a role in another ISPS HANDA Australian Open. I thank all members for their support of the event. To those members who will give up their time to volunteer, thank you. To all others who will attend as a spectator, it's a good time to reflect on how fortunate we all are to be associated with such a wonderfully presented golf course. It's a course that received fantastic reviews from the professionals in 2022, and I'm sure similar reviews will be forthcoming at the completion of this year's event.

Congratulations to James Sutherland and his team at Golf Australia for all their efforts in growing the game of golf. Again, this year we will see three titles up for grabs, being the men's and women's Australian Open Championships and the Australian All Abilities Championship. The variety in competition will certainly

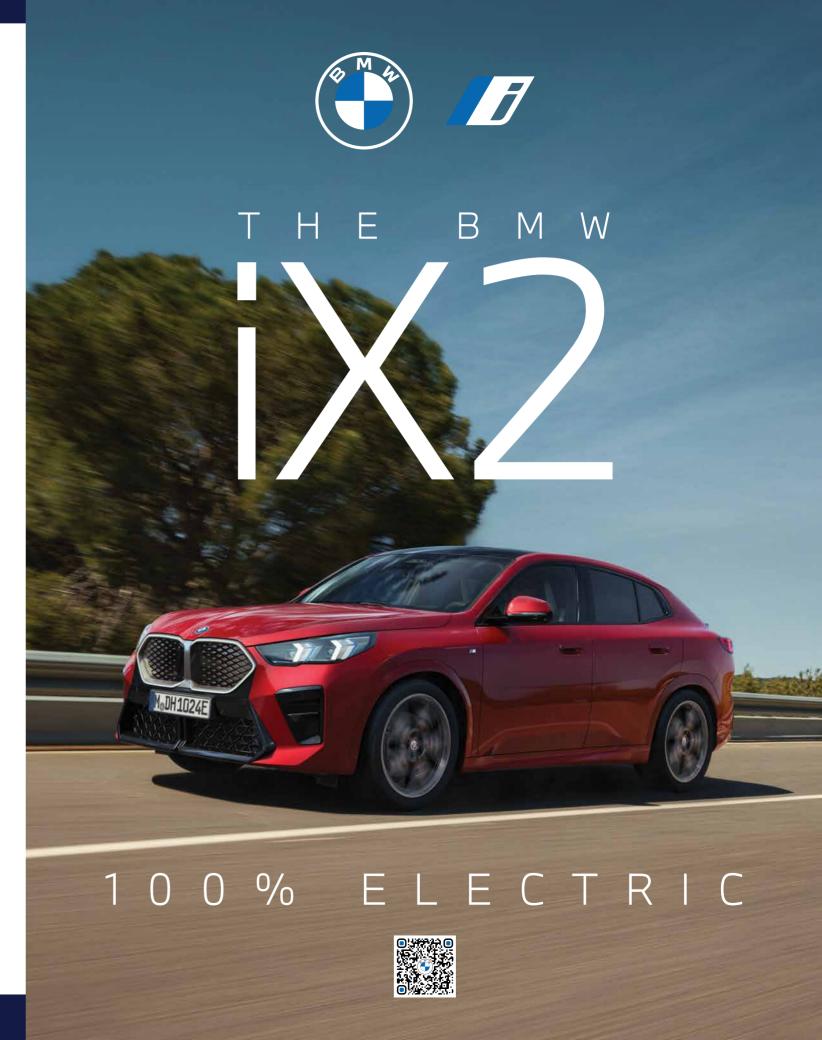
bring additional eveballs onto the event. which can only be good for the game.

The Victoria Golf Club has a long history of hosting both men's and women's professional tournaments, whereby all of us as members have had a chance to witness how the best players in the world navigate their way around our unforgiving layout.

With Victoria this year playing a support role to Kingston Heath Golf Club, it provides us with the rare opportunity for members to play the course in tournament conditions. Given our commitment to the event concludes after the completion of the second round, the club will be open for play immediately on the Saturday morning and into the weekend. Good luck to all members who have secured a tee-time over the weekend.

Bruce Peacock Captain









PLAYER PROFILES

Who to follow in this year's field, including the marquee pros, top amateurs and must-see All-Abilities participants. By Evin Priest



AGE: 31

FROM: Brisbane. Queensland

TOUR: LIV Golf/majors **WORLD RANKING: 119**

2024 FORM Wins: 0

Top 10s: 8

Top 25s: 10

HIS STORY: After a 2023 LIV Golf season that featured wins in London and New Jersey, as well as personal-best finishes at two majors – a T-9 at the PGA and a fourth at the US Open - Smith has not been able to recapture the same form in 2024. This year has been solid, with two runner-up results on LIV, but not spectacular. Highlights included a T-6 at the Masters as well as guiding Ripper GC to a season-long teams victory on LIV. It's not quite the same stellar golf we saw from Smith in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Individually, though, the Australian Open presents a golden opportunity for Smith to win his first Stonehaven Cup.



AGE: 26

FROM: Perth. Western Australia

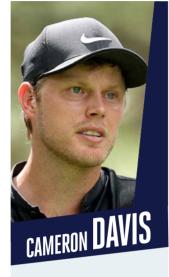
TOUR: PGA Tour/majors **WORLD RANKING: 42 2024 FORM**

Wins: 0

Top 10s: 3

Top 25s: 10

HIS STORY: Last year, Lee enjoyed top-six results at the Plavers Championship and US Open. He also secured his PGA Tour card for 2024, before winning the Macau Open and the Australian PGA to close out 2023. In his first full season as a member of the PGA Tour this year, Lee passed with flying colours. He enjoyed two runner-up results: at the Palm Beach event in Florida and the Rocket Mortgage Classic. Lee was also top-30 at the Masters, US Open, PGA Championship and in his Olympics debut for Australia in Paris. He also made a first appearance for the International team at the Presidents Cup in Montreal.



AGE: 29

FROM: Sydney, New South Wales

TOUR: PGA Tour/majors **WORLD RANKING: 45**

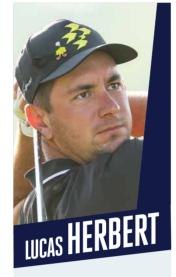
2024 FORM

Wins: 1

Top 10s: 2

Top 25s: 7

HIS STORY: Davis has said his breakthrough win at the 2017 Australian Open launched his pro career, so it goes without saying where the Sydnevsider holds the Stonehaven Cup in his heart. Now based in Seattle, Washington, Davis was outstanding in 2024 – in fact, the only winner from Australia on the PGA Tour. Davis claimed his second career Rocket Mortgage Classic title in Detroit. He was also in contention through three rounds at Augusta National, where he secured his personal best finish at the Masters with a T-12.



AGE: 28

FROM: Bendigo, Victoria **TOUR:** LIV Golf/Asian

Tour/majors

WORLD RANKING: 185

2024 FORM

Wins: 0

Top 10s: 5

Top 25s: 10

HIS STORY: This was the Bendigo product's first season on LIV Golf playing for Smith's Ripper GC. Herbert was vital for the team's consistency and his play towards the end of the individual season, as well as some crucial results in the teams championship in Dallas, helped Ripper GC post their first seasonlong victory. When Herbert played away from LIV, he was solid with two top-10s in International Series events on the Asian Tour and a T-43 at the PGA Championship. The three-time DP World Tour winner and onetime PGA Tour winner has improved his overall game learning under Smith, and teammates Marc Leishman and Matt Jones.





PLAYER PROFILES





AGE: 25

FROM: Santiago, Chile TOUR: LIV Golf/Asian

Tour/majors

WORLD RANKING: 136 2024 FORM

Wins: 2

Top 10s: 10

Top 25s: 14

HIS STORY: The defending Australian Open champion arrives in Melbourne having carried his sensational 2023 form, when he won at The Australian Golf Club in a playoff, into 2024. The Chilean has not missed a cut worldwide this year and secured two LIV Golf wins. Like this time last year, Niemann is not yet in any of the majors for 2025 and the Melbourne Sandbelt is an ideal place to snare one of three spots into the 153rd Open Championship given that our Open is among a series of global qualifying events for the UK major.



AGE: 41

FROM: Warrnambool, Victoria

TOUR: LIV Golf

WORLD RANKING:

862

2024 FORM

Wins: 0

Top 10s: 4

Top 25s: 9

HIS STORY: The former six-time winner on the PGA Tour had a resurgent LIV Golf season, his third campaign since joining the league in late 2022. Leishman was a chance to win LIV Golf Singapore where he was T-2, while he contributed heavily to Ripper GC's season-long win.



AGE: 27

FROM: Perth, Western

Australia **TOUR:** LPGA Tour

WORLD RANKING: 5

2024 FORM

Wins: 3

Top 10s: 5 **Top 25s:** 10

HER STORY:

Australia's best golfer in 2024 by a country mile. Three wins on the LPGA Tour, including at the recent BMW Ladies Championship in Korea, as well as a start on Australia's Olympic women's team in Paris alongside Minjee Lee, capped her incredible year overseas. While Green won her first major in 2019 at the Women's PGA Championship. she is still searching for a maiden Women's Australian Open crown and all signs point to this being Green's year.



AGE: 28

FROM: Perth, Western Australia

TOUR: LPGA Tour

WORLD RANKING: 17

2024 FORM

Wins: 0

Top 10s: 4

Top 25s: 8

HER STORY: Last year, Lee joined a stellar club that includes Jan Stephenson and Karrie Webb as the only Australians to win 10 LPGA titles. This year has been a little leaner, although Lee did have a golden chance to win a third major at the US Women's Open at Lancaster Country Club in Pennsylvania, but a back-nine fade during the final round relegated her to T-9. However. Lee appears poised to contend for a maiden Women's Australian

Open crown having

Ashleigh Buhai during

the past two editions.

finished second to



AGE: 35

FROM: Johannesburg, South Africa

TOUR: LPGA Tour

WORLD RANKING: 57 2024 FORM

Wins: 0

Top 10s: 2

Top 25s: 8 **HER STORY:** Buhai was a star amateur who frequently played in

Australia as a teenager and, once she turned pro, broke through for a major at the 2022 AIG Women's Open at Muirfield. She signed off that year by winning the Women's Australian Open in the first year of the event's mixed format. Buhai carried that form into 2023, winning the South African Women's Open and Shoprite LPGA Classic before adding a second straight Women's

Australian Open crown,

this time in Sydney.



AGE: 24

FROM: Sydney, New South Wales

TOUR: LPGA Tour

WORLD RANKING: 53 2024 FORM

Wins: 0

Top 10s: 1

Top 25s: 4

HER STORY: Kyriacou shot to prominence as an amateur with a statement victory at the 2020 Australian Ladies Classic Bonville by eight strokes before she had turned pro. That secured a two-year exemption on the Ladies European Tour, which

she then used to catapult herself to the LPGA Tour in the US. This year, Kyriacou's lone top-10 from 21 starts came via a second place at a major, the Evian Championship in France, where she stayed in contention until the 72nd green. Kyriacou shot an impressive final round of 67 only to lose by one stroke to Japan's

Ayaka Furue.



AGE: 32

FROM: San Francisco,

TOUR: LPGA Tour

WORLD RANKING: 202

2024 FORM

Wins: 0 **Top 10s:** 0

Open.

Top 25s: 1

HER STORY: On-course results have not been good for a player with one major among her six career LPGA Tour wins, the last of which came in 2022. The Las Vegas resident faced an enforced lay-off throughout much of 2022 due to a spinal tumour, and is still regaining her form. As such, Kang has not recorded a top-10 on the 2024 LPGA Tour and owns just one top-25. The four-time Solheim Cup player will be looking for a bounce-back win on the Sandbelt, and is a past top-five finisher at the Women's Australian



AGE: 23

FROM: Sydney, New South Wales

TOUR: LPGA Tour

WORLD RANKING: 74

2024 FORM

Wins: 0 **Top 10s:** 3

Top 25s: 8

HER STORY: The Sydneysider captured a gold medal at the 2018 Summer Youth Olympics as part of a glittering amateur career before bursting onto the pro scene and cracking the US landscape. Kim won once on the secondary Epson Tour in 2022 before her maiden LPGA Tour victory last year. In 2024, Kim has not managed to back up

that LPGA breakthrough,

top-10s among eight top-

included a playoff loss at

the Meijer LPGA Classic.

but has enjoyed three

25s. Her three top-10s

12 OFFICIAL PROGRAM OF 2024 ISPS HANDA AUSTRALIAN OPEN



ALL ABILITIES PLAYER PROFILES



AGE: 27

FROM: Yongin, South Korea

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW: The Korean professional golfer will make his debut at the Australian All Abilities Championship, bringing an impressive résumé. Lee, who is autistic, won the men's intellectual impairment category at both the 2022 and 2023 US Adaptive Opens and earned the title of men's overall champion in 2022 after a dramatic two-hole playoff. Lee has competed professionally in tournaments on the Korean PGA Tour and his participation in Melbourne promises to add an extra layer to the competitive all-abilities field.



AGE: 32

FROM: Pialba, Queensland

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW: Wood played his handicap down to 3 as a teenager before he was seriously injured in a car accident that shattered his leg into 44 pieces and required 33 operations. Wood is a PGA professional who underwent his Membership Pathway Program at Hervey Bay Golf Club and won the 2023 New Zealand All-Abilities, Victorian Inclusive, Webex Player Series Hunter Valley All Abilities, Queensland Inclusive and West Australian All Abilities titles. Wood's 2023 season was highlighted by becoming the first Aussie to win the Australian All Abilities Championship.





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AMATEUR PLAYER PROFILES



FROM: Corrimal, New South Wales

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW: Cascio has an impressive record for a 17-year-old. A member of the NSW Junior Team, Cascio won the 2024 Australian Junior Amateur as well as a sentimental win at the Wollongong Golf Club Championship. With a career-low round of six-under-par at both Wollongong and Belmont golf clubs, Cascio's game is improving rapidly under teaching pro Josh Rindfleish at The Australian Golf Club, where Cascio is also a member. His favourite golfer is Min Woo Lee.



AGE: 18

FROM: Gold Coast, Queensland

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW: Singh calmy ground out a two-over 73 on the final day at the Australian Junior Amateur to finish at five-under and a two-shot victory. It was Singh's third World Amateur Golf Ranking official win after the 2023 NSW Amateur and 2022 Victorian Junior



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Joaquin Niemann travelled Down Under in 2023 looking for major starts. Now he's back, and wants to reconnect with his love of Melbourne. By Evin Priest



ISPS HANDA AUSTRALIAN OPEN

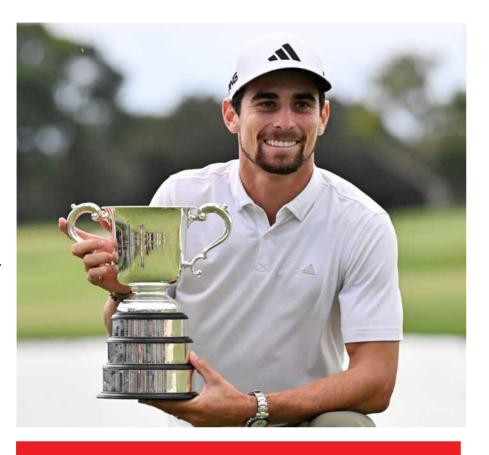
HE irony was not lost on ISPS
HANDA Australian Open
champion Joaquin Niemann,
nor his brother, Lukas. In June,
Niemann, the Chilean golf star who in
2022 left the PGA Tour for LIV Golf, was
playing in a 36-hole final qualifier for the
US Open. The last-chance event was held
at The Bears Club, just minutes from his
US home in Jupiter, Florida. Niemann
missed a playoff for the fifth and final
spot... by one shot.

"I joked to my brother that I qualified for The Open by going all the way to Australia on a 16-hour flight from Chile and there were 156 players and I won," Niemann told AUSTRALIAN GOLF DIGEST. "Then I go and play five minutes away from my house in sectional qualifying for the US Open and I didn't make it."

Niemann saw the humour in the irony, but took it on the chin as a consequence of his move to LIV in 2022. He left the PGA Tour in late August that year as part of a six-strong group of signings that included Cam Smith, Marc Leishman, Anirban Lahiri, Harold Varner III and Cameron Tringale, Niemann was ranked world No.19 and had two career PGA Tour victories when he left, including at Riviera Country Club. He had played on the International team at the 2019 Presidents Cup at Royal Melbourne. But playing on LIV, which does not award Official World Golf Ranking (OWGR) points for its 54-hole, no-cut events, meant he now plays only a handful of events that accumulate points. The OWGR is used by the four majors as the main criteria for entry.

Niemann's world ranking plummeted after leaving the PGA Tour. By the time he arrived in Brisbane for the 2023 Australian PGA Championship, he was 82nd. But he certainly has no regrets about his 11,000-kilometre flight to Australia. At the end of 2023, he wasn't eligible for any of the four majors in 2024 and, as he says, Australia is also a fantastic place to visit and compete.

"My main goal [in coming to Australia] was trying to get world ranking points to make it into the top 50 for the end of the year to get into all the majors," Niemann recalls. Traditionally, the world's top 50 on December 31 each year are invited by



IT WAS SPECIAL. I HAD A GOOD FEELING THAT I WAS GOING TO BE PLAYING IN ALL THE MAJORS; IT ENDED UP WORKING OUT PRETTY WELL GOING TO AUSTRALIA

- JOAQUIN NIEMANN

Augusta National to the Masters. Staying inside that number through July triggers access to the PGA, US Open and Open Championship. "I was playing great golf at the end of [2023] and I wanted to keep it going a little bit to get that momentum. Mainly, I was in Australia because of the majors and, other than that, I enjoyed my time in Australia. Golf [in Australia] is a little bit different than in other countries and crowds are great."

Niemann finished fifth at Royal Queensland, which is also a DP World Tour co-sanctioned event. The next week, Niemann triumphed in a suddendeath playoff when he defeated Rikuya Hoshino at The Australian Golf Club. He joined a long list of Stonehaven Cup winners that, among others, includes Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Greg Norman and Tom Watson.

Like the Australian PGA, the world-ranking bump wasn't fantastic, and it wasn't enough to re-enter the top 50 by December 31. But the Australian Open is among a group of tournaments called the Open Qualifying Series. In each, spots are given to the next Open

Championship to a select number of high finishers not already exempt. "I knew the Australian Open was giving spots away for The Open, so that convinced me to go," Niemann says. "The Australian Open... you see the trophy and the names and you realise there's a lot of history in there. It would be nice if they have more spots for more majors."

Niemann's Stonehaven Cup victory was a start. What he didn't realise was the organisers of the other majors were paying attention. In February, the Masters Tournament committee extended a special invitation to Niemann for the April major, Chairman Fred Ridley and his Augusta National colleagues were impressed at Niemann's globetrotting efforts to gain entry to the majors rather than complain about LIV's lack of access. That's because he also travelled to the Middle East for the DP World Tour's Dubai Desert Classic, where he was T-4, and the Asian Tour's International Series Oman, where he was third. Add the LIV events Niemann played in the first three months of 2024, including Mexico, Las Vegas, Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong, and he travelled





BETTY IMAGES. ANGEL MARTINEZ. (PREVIOUS SPREAD), SAKED KHAN (LEFT), DAVID CANNON (TOP); ANOY CHEUNG (RIGHT)



more than 70.000 kilometres in the 14 weeks between the Australian Open in late November and early March. It was then that the PGA of America followed the Masters and invited Niemann to the PGA Championship at Valhalla.

Looking back, Niemann is grateful for the recognition. "It felt great having the back-up from the majors," Niemann says, recording finishes of T-22 at Augusta and T-39 at Valhalla. "I knew if I played well, I would find a way to get in [somehow]. For a moment, I thought I was not getting into the Masters. I never thought they were going to invite me. It was special. I had a good feeling that I was going to be playing in all of them; it ended up working out pretty well going to Australia."

RETURN DOWN UNDER

A year later, Niemann finds himself in the same boat. He's not in any of golf's four biggest events for 2025 as he prepares to defend his Australian Open title. Regardless, he's still champing at

the bit to return to Australian shores and defend one of the oldest trophies in golf on the Melbourne Sandbelt, no less. And there is still that carrot dangling of three spots in the 153rd Open Championship at Royal Portrush.

Niemann is especially excited to ending a five-year absence from the Melbourne Sandbelt when he tees up at Australian Open co-hosts Kingston Heath and The Victoria Golf Club from November 28 to December 1. It will be Niemann's third trip to Australia in 12 months, including the past summer of golf and LIV Golf Adelaide at The Grange in April.

"Australia, the whole country is nice. I enjoyed it last year in Brisbane and Sydney; they were two beautiful places," he says. "In Australia you're used to

playing good golf courses and I think this year will be the same. We're going to Victoria and Kingston Heath. That's not far from where [I] played the [2019] Presidents Cup [at Royal Melbourne].

"At the Australian Open, you see more people than many tournaments that you play around the world. And the golf courses... In 2019, Royal Melbourne was one of my favourite courses. It was super firm, fast. You can play so many different shots off the tee and into the green."

One thing is certain: Niemann dreams of etching his name alongside multiple winners of the Stonehaven Cup, like Player (seven), Nicklaus (six), Norman (five) and Jordan Spieth (two).

"I feel like it should be ranked higher," Niemann says of the Australian Open. "It's a great tournament."

I FEEL LIKE IT SHOULD BE RANKED **HIGHER; IT'S A GREAT TOURNAMENT**



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STEPS UP?

















ATER this month when you walk into Kingston Heath Golf Club, the primary host of this year's ISPS HANDA Australian Open, you'll no doubt be gobsmacked by the sheer rustic, Australiana beauty of one of the most famous courses in world golf. The reason this Melbourne Sandbelt icon will have both the form to impress golf fans and the function to host a mixedformat Australian Open is thanks to an army of paid staff and volunteers from across the country - and even overseas working tirelessly in the months leading up to the event. Come tournament week, each agronomist is like Santa Claus working late at night and early in the morning to ensure the next day is special.

Here, Kingston Heath superintendent Hayden Mead speaks about how greens staff come together to pull off hosting duties at one of the oldest golf tournaments in the world.

During the Australian Open, we will have just over 20 paid staff and about 35 volunteer staff. It's a really big week and a big honour for the turf industry; all these dedicated people

THEY ALL DO IT FOR THE LOVE OF GOLF AND FOR THE TURF INDUSTRY

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- HAYDEN MEAD

fly in from a variety of places. We will have a greenskeeper representing every Australian state (except the territories), with six or seven staff travelling over from New Zealand. They're giving up their time. While a lot of the golf clubs pay their usual wage to come and work here for 38 hours, the reality is they're doing more than 38. Many of them are also paying for their own flights, and so we have [Melbourne-based greenskeepers] house them and feed them. They all do it for the love of golf and for the turf industry.

During tournament week, including practice rounds, the 50-plus greenskeepers we'll have get together and cut the entire property every morning in about two or three hours. During this week, we sort of live in the dark – cutting grass in the early mornings and

preparing the course for the following day each night. No one sees us [laughs].

With that said, tournament week is really the fun part. Nothing can really go wrong from an agronomy standpoint. My nerves come during the applications [of turf management products] about six months out. Every application we do, from six months to two weeks out, makes you wonder, How's this going to affect tournament week? Tournament week, though, is the exciting time. We get into a really good groove with all our staff, paid and volunteer. Everyone's enjoying it, and the course is in the best shape we can get it.

In the weeks leading up to the Australian Open, we don't want to make the greens too firm. We just nurse them along, then start to dry them into the week prior. We don't put too much pressure on them. We keep them at the same cutting height and ease them into hosting the tournament. As for the couch [fairways and around the greens] surfaces, the soil temperature is a bit higher than this time last year, so we've had additional growth, which is really good. Most of the turf management is done before the event.

down - weather permitting - as we get

The greens are the easier surface to prepare for the tournament because this time of year is optimal for bentgrass growth. For a November/ December tournament, the more challenging surface to prepare is the couch grass, as it's just come out of [winter] dormancy. The months leading up to the Australian Open, as the weather warms up, is when you want to push the couch grass for full coverage.

You might be wondering what's involved in preparing a course for both men's and women's tournaments held simultaneously. Again, the hard part isn't tournament week – it's the six months leading up to the Australian Open. Preparing two sets of tees and protecting them through

the winter is key. We have plenty of tournament tee options, so we're pretty comfortable with the men's tees, which aren't used in winter. But most of the women's tees are in the middle of the tee boxes used by our members during winter, so we really work hard to protect those areas while allowing member play. Balancing this over such a long period is a juggling act.

The DP World Tour and Golf Australia work closely with us in setting up the two courses for the event. We don't set

the pin positions, but sometimes they ask our opinion about specific placements each day. We cut the holes and set markers where they request. As for firmness and speed, with Kingston Heath and The Victoria Golf Club sharing host duties, I'll sit down with Steven Newell, the superintendent at Victoria, every day after our morning work to compare notes. We aim to keep our greens as close in speed as possible, usually around 11.5 to 12 on the Stimpmeter. The firmness of the fairways, however, depends almost entirely on the weather.





S GARY LISBO



ASHLEIGH BUHAI • 35 • SOUTH AFRICA

MY SHOT

ASHLEIGH BUHAI

The defending Women's ISPS HANDA Australian Open champion is eyeing a hat-trick of Patricia Bridges Bowls in Melbourne. Interviewed by Evin Priest

T'S not easy to earn records in Australian women's golf considering the great Karrie Webb dominated the game Down Under – not to mention the LPGA Tour in the US – for so long. But South Africa's Ashleigh Buhai – let's call her "Aussie Ash" - will shoot for a rare historical feat this month. At the Women's Australian Open in Melbourne, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary, the 35-year-old from Johannesburg will attempt to become the first player to win the event three years in a row. Webb claimed five victories in her brilliant career, but the most consecutive times she hoisted the Patricia Bridges Bowl was twice (2007-2008). Webb also grabbed two titles in three years between 2000 and 2002. A 'three-peat' has never been done.

Buhai's dominance at the Women's Australian Open since it became a mixed event in 2022 – with the men's, women's and Australian All

Abilities Championship fields playing concurrently across two courses - is fitting considering Buhai developed a love affair with Australia upon her first trip here 23 years ago. Three years after her maiden voyage, the girl named Ashleigh Simon enjoyed success in Australia at the 2004 Jack Newton Junior International Classic. Her first big Australian victory as a pro was the 2022 Women's Australian Open at Kingston Heath and Victoria, where she defeated Jiyai Shin by a shot. That came only months after she had won the Women's Open at Muirfield for her first major. Buhai successfully defended her Australian Open crown last year, at co-hosts The Lakes and The Australian, where she held off two-time major winner Minjee Lee, also by one shot.

In preparation for her defence, Buhai opened up on why she loves Australia, the Melbourne Sandbelt, what a three-peat would mean and where the atmosphere ranks in global women's golf.





IT'S THE MOST COMFORTABLE I FEEL OTHER THAN WHEN I PLAY IN SOUTH AFRICA, BECAUSE OF THE SUPPORT I GET

I'm really chuffed to be coming back to Australia to try to defend for a second time. I'm excited that we're going back to Melbourne to play Kingston Heath and Victoria, two fantastic golf courses.

It would be a huge honour to get my name on that trophy again. There are some greats on there [such as Webb, Annika Sorenstam, Nelly Korda]. To be the first to win it three consecutive times would be so special, but also there's extra pressure. There's obviously going to be some good competition in Melbourne so I'll have to play well.

It's been a little bit of an up-and-down season. From May through July, I was dealing with a back injury and on top of that I broke my toe. I didn't play for six weeks heading into the Olympics [in August]. But I'm starting to trend nicely.

What I love about coming to

Australia is I've been coming here since I was a junior – 12 years old. There's a familiarity. I think South Africans and Australians, we have a lot in common in sport, food and weather. South Africans always feel comfortable here.

You've got unbelievable golf courses,

especially on the Sandbelt. It's a style of golf where you have to be creative, flight the ball and be smart. I think it suits my game.

I've got family and friends who have already booked their flights to come to Melbourne, so it's going to be exciting for



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TO BE THE FIRST TO WIN IT THREE **CONSECUTIVE TIMES WOULD BE** SO SPECIAL, BUT ALSO THERE'S **EXTRA PRESSURE**

me to see them and play in front of them again. Anytime you're up against Aussies like Minjee [Lee], Hannah [Green], Grace [Kim] and Steph [Kyriacou], it's always going to be tough.

I think it's amazing to have the men and women and All Abilities together. We know the men are the drawcards and bring in the crowds, but for us to be able to play in between all of them and to have those crowds all the way around, it just brings such an unbelievable atmosphere. I remember walking up No.18 [at The

Australian Golf Club] last year and

looking at that embankment. It was just full of people. I got goosebumps. I think it's a great concept and I wish we did it more often around the world.

Coming down the stretch and having to hold off Minjee, because she played so well on that Sunday, was amazing, I think anytime a South African beats an Aussie or an Aussie beats a South African, we like to have the bragging rights. I think for me this year it's more that I love coming down here. It's the most comfortable I feel other than when I play in South Africa, because of the support I get. I feel the Aussie crowds are very fair. Obviously on Sunday last year, they were 'pulling' for Minjee. But once I holed that winning put, they all cheered for me. It was fantastic.

The Olympics this year in Paris were unreal. The crowds, the atmosphere,

it's the best I've ever played in front of. But I would say that the Aussie Open, in terms of the people and tournament and spectatorship, is the next best I've played in front of. It would be very exciting for us as women players if we were able to get more crowds like [the Australian Open], week in and week out.

In 2022 [I played in the group in front of Adam Scott]. Growing up, Adam was one of my role models I looked up to. Being in the company of some of the best male golfers and women golfers in the world - I got to play with "Webby" the first two days - was very special for me.

It will definitely help that I've played Kingston Heath and Victoria before, because we're not too sure when we're arriving in Melbourne. That depends on the [LPGA's] CME Championship [held in Florida the week before]. It does impact when we'll arrive. We are most likely only going to get to Australia on the Tuesday. It's a little bit of a disadvantage, but having played both courses before, at least we're not going into it completely blind. I can't wait.

Like our Aussie golfers, we excel on home turf.









MAJOR MOTIVATION

There's plenty of opportunities for the players to be motivated by at this year's ISPS HANDA Australian Open. By Evin Priest

SPOTS UP FOR GRABS AT THE 153RD OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

THE 2024 ISPS HANDA Australian Open is part of the Open Qualifying Series (OQS) for 2025, an initiative from the R&A designed to offer golfers from around the world a series of tournaments that feature qualifying into The 153rd Open at Royal Portrush. The OQS comprises a series of professional tour events across multiple continents in an effort to globally spread the avenues to golf's original major.

The Australian Open awards three spots to the highest finishers not already exempt into The Open. When there is a tie on the leaderboard, the tiebreaker is that the player with the higher world ranking (as published at the start of that week) will be awarded a place in The Open.

Last year, Chile's Joaquin Niemann, who won the Australian Open, as well as runner-up Rikuva Hoshino and Adam Scott, secured their spots in The 152nd Open at Royal Troon. Scott went on to finished T-10 at Troon.



HOW DOES IT WORK? THE AUSTRALIAN



For the third straight year, the ISPS HANDA Australian Open will use its unique, mixed format. The men's, women's and all-abilities tournaments will be played concurrently over two courses – The Victoria Golf Club will share host duties for the first two days while Kingston Heath will serve as the primary host with play all four days. Rounds three and four will be held only at Kingston Heath.

The men's field will be comprised of 156 players and 84 women, and each event will compete for prize purse of \$1.7 million (\$3.4) million across two tournaments). The Australian All Abilities Championship (AAAC) will field the top-12 ranked golfers with a disability as part of the G4D Tour. The event is supported in its entirety by Visit Victoria.

Like last year, there will be a cut made to both the men's and women's fields after 36 holes. All players who make the cut earn a cheque, with male and female professionals earning the equivalent figure per finishing position.

The AAAC, which is 54 holes, will conclude on Saturday, November 30, while the Stonehaven Cup and Patricia Bridges Bowl will be lifted by the men's and women's champions on Sunday,

Melbourne's iconic Sandbelt region hosted the inaugural mixed Australian Open in 2022. It was the first time in 20 years the Sandbelt had hosted the men's national Open and now the Australian championship returns to the country's most celebrated area of golf courses.

The men's Australian Open is co-sanctioned by the DP World Tour and the Challenger PGA Tour of Australasia. The women's Australian Open is be sanctioned by the WPGA Tour of Australasia and the 2024 event will include the fifth edition of the AAAC.



PARTNER ACKNOWLEDGMENT



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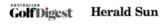
























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HONOUR ROLLS



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MEN'S AUSTRALIAN OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP (SINCE WWII)

	• /			,			
Year	Winner	Venue	Score	1984	Tom Watson (USA)	Royal Melbourne	281
1946	Ossie Pickworth	Royal Sydney	289	1985	Greg Norman	Royal Melbourne	212*
1947	Ossie Pickworth	Royal Queensland	285	1986	Rodger Davis	Metropolitan	278
1948	Ossie Pickworth	Kingston Heath	289	1987	Greg Norman	Royal Melbourne	273
1949	Eric Cremin	The Australian	287	1988	Mark Calcavecchia (USA)	Royal Sydney	269
1950	Norman Von Nida	Kooyonga	286	1989	Peter Senior	Kingston Heath	271
1951	Peter Thomson	Metropolitan	283	1990	John Morse (USA)	The Australian	283
1952	Norman Von Nida	Lake Karrinyup	278	1991	Wayne Riley	Royal Melbourne	285
1953	Norman Von Nida	Royal Melbourne	278	1992	Steve Elkington	The Lakes	280
1954	Ossie Pickworth	Kooyonga	280	1993	Brad Faxon (USA)	Metropolitan	275
1955	Bobby Locke (RSA)	Gailes	290	1994	Robert Allenby	Royal Sydney	280
1956	Bruce Crampton	Royal Sydney	289	1995	Greg Norman	Kingston Heath	278
1957	Frank Phillips	Kingston Heath	287	1996	Greg Norman	The Australian	280
1958	Gary Player (RSA)	Kooyonga	271	1997	Lee Westwood (ENG)	Metropolitan	274
1959	Kel Nagle	The Australian	284	1998	Greg Chalmers	Royal Adelaide	288
1960	Bruce Devlin (a)	Lake Karrinyup	282	1999	Aaron Baddeley (a)	Royal Sydney	274
1961	Frank Phillips	Victoria	275	2000	Aaron Baddeley	Kingston Heath	278
1962	Gary Player (RSA)	Royal Adelaide	281	2001	Stuart Appleby	The Grand	271
1963	Gary Player (RSA)	Royal Melbourne	278	2002	Stephen Allan	Victoria	198*
1964	Jack Nicklaus (USA)	The Lakes	287	2003	Peter Lonard	Moonah Links	279
1965	Gary Player (RSA)	Kooyonga	264	2004	Peter Lonard	The Australian	281
1966	Arnold Palmer (USA)	Royal Queensland	276	2005	Robert Allenby	Moonah Links	284
1967	Peter Thomson	Commonwealth	281	2006	John Senden	Royal Sydney	280
1968	Jack Nicklaus (USA)	Lake Karrinyup	270	2007	Craig Parry	The Australian	277
1969	Gary Player (RSA)	Royal Sydney	288	2008	Tim Clark (RSA)	Royal Sydney	279
1970	Gary Player (RSA)	Kingston Heath	280	2009	Adam Scott	New South Wales	273
1971	Jack Nicklaus (USA)	Royal Hobart	269	2010	Geoff Ogilvy	The Lakes	269
1972	Peter Thomson	Kooyonga	281	2011	Greg Chalmers	The Lakes	275
1973	J.C. Snead (USA)	Royal Queensland	280	2012	Peter Senior	The Lakes	284
1974	Gary Player (RSA)	Lake Karrinyup	277	2013	Rory McIlroy (NIR)	Royal Sydney	270
1975	Jack Nicklaus (USA)	The Australian	279	2014	Jordan Spieth (USA)	The Australian	271
1976	Jack Nicklaus (USA)	The Australian	286	2015	Matt Jones	The Australian	276
197 7	David Graham	The Australian	284	2016	Jordan Spieth (USA)	Royal Sydney	276
1978	Jack Nicklaus (USA)	The Australian	284	2017	Cameron Davis	The Australian	273
1979	Jack Newton	Metropolitan	288	2018	Abraham Ancer (MEX)	The Lakes	272
1980	Greg Norman	The Lakes	284	2019	Matt Jones	The Australian	269
1981	Bill Rogers (USA)	Victoria	282	2020-202	21: No championship due to COVII)-19	
1982	Bob Shearer	The Australian	287	2022	Adrian Meronk (POL)	Victoria/K'ston Heat	
1983	Peter Fowler	Kingston Heath	285	2023	Joaquin Niemann (CHI)	The Australian/Lake	s 271

WOMEN'S AUSTRALIAN OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

Terrey Hills

Royal Sydney

Kingston Heath

Metropolitan

Concord

Mhairi McKay (SCO)

Laura Davies (ENG) 2005-2006: No championship

Laura Davies (ENG)

Karrie Webb

Karrie Webb

•••	0 /						
Year	Winner	Venue	Score	2010	Yani Tseng (TWN)	Commonwealth	283
1974	Chako Higuchi (JPN)	Victoria	219	2011	Yani Tseng (TWN)	Commonwealth	276
1975	JoAnne Carner (USA)	The Australian	228	2012	Jessica Korda (USA)	Royal Melbourne	289
1976	Donna Caponi Young (USA)	Victoria	206	2013	Jiyai Shin (KOR)	Royal Canberra	274
1977	Jan Stephenson	Manly	145*	2014	Karrie Webb	Victoria	276
1978	Debbie Austin (USA)	Manly	213	2015	Lydia Ko (NZL)	Royal Melbourne	283
1979-1993: No championship			2016	Haru Nomura (JPN)	Grange	272	
1994	Annika Sorenstem (SWE)	Royal Adelaide	286	2017	Ha Na Jang (KOR)	Royal Adelaide	282
1995	Liselotte Neumann (SWE)	Yarra Yarra	283	2018	Jin Young Ko (KOR)	Kooyonga	274
1996	Catriona Matthew (SCO)	Yarra Yarra	283	2019	Nelly Korda (USA)	Grange	271
1997	Jane Crafter	Yarra Yarra	279	2020	Inbee Park (KOR)	Royal Adelaide	278
1998	Marnie McGuire (NZL)	Yarra Yarra	280	2021:	No championship due to CO	VID-19	
1999: No	o championship			2022	Ashleigh Buhai (RSA)	Victoria/K'ston Hea	th 277
2000	Karrie Webb	Yarra Yarra	270	2023	Ashleigh Buhai (RSA)	The Australian/Lak	kes 280
2001	Sophie Gustafson (SWE)	Yarra Yarra	276	ALICT	RALIAN ALL ABIL	ITIES CHAMDIC	MCHII
2002	Karrie Webb	Yarra Yarra	278	AUSI	RALIAN ALL ADIL	THES CHAMPIC	изпі

277

283

278

Year	Winner	Venue	Score			
2018	Johan Kammerstad (SWE)	The Lakes	233			
2019	Johan Kammerstad (SWE)	The Australian	236			
2020-2021: No championship due to COVID-19						
2022	Kipp Popert (ENG)	Victoria/K'ston He	eath 214			
2023	Lachlan Wood	The Australian	213			



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