

Colsaerts electric in Qatar

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Nicolas Colsaerts: Ready to contend at ideal course

If you're still struggling to come to terms with what happened in the Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship, imagine how Gary Stal feels.

The 22-year-old Frenchman, who somehow gave major champion Martin Kaymer 10 shots and a beating over the closing 12 holes, has only a couple of days to recover as the Qatar Masters begins on Wednesday, to account for a Friday-Saturday weekend in this part of the world.

I did consider whether this shorter turnaround appears to have negatively affected performances of those playing both events, but that doesn't look to be the case and, given that we're a one-hour flight from Abu Dhabi, this makes sense.

Indeed you might expect that players will find it easier to hold onto momentum throughout the desert swing and that's been the case in some instances, with the likes of George Coetzee, Rafa Cabrera-Bello and Steve Webster enjoying productive runs.

What we do know is that the course, Doha GC, hasn't changed a great deal over the years. Luke Donald said as much when he returned from a six-year absence to tee it up last season, and relaid greens in advance of the 2014 edition didn't prevent the likes of Coetzee, Cabrera-Bello, Mikko Ilonen and eventual champion Sergio Garcia from continuing strong associations with what remains a familiar layout.

As with Abu Dhabi GC, it's designed by Peter Harradine and not dissimilar to last week's venue. Rightly, Doha has earned a reputation as being the toughest of the three courses used in the Middle East swing but it's not overly difficult, especially given that there's a real lack of punishment off the tee. Coetzee hit just over 35% of fairways on his way to fifth last year while Garcia ranked just 54th for driving accuracy.

The key defences come via the wind and the greens.

This is an event which was reduced to 54 holes thanks to strong gales in 2012 when Open champ Paul Lawrie won for a second time, and when we see the likes of Ernie Els, Thomas Bjorn, Adam Scott and Garcia on the roll-of-honour it's hard not to think of the Claret Jug and players who can battle the elements. Indeed, even 'surprise' 2013 winner Chris Wood is a player whose finest hours elsewhere have come in the Open Championship.

Ilonen and Garcia, meanwhile, are former holders of the Amateur Championship, as is shock turn of the century winner Rolf Muntz who, like Garcia, landed that historic event at Muirfield. In my opinion there is absolutely no coincidence to this and I'd urge anyone seeking their own selections to strongly consider form at the Open and on links layouts in general, even in the unpaid ranks.

As for the greens, they're notoriously grainy, with Henrik Stenson declaring that the key for him to play well here is to ensure he doesn't leave downhill, downgrain and downwind putts. It may also be no coincidence that the last 10 Qatar champions, including the likes of Joakim Haeggman and Darren Fichardt, have won tournaments in Asia or Africa where grain is considered a big factor. Wood's first professional title, don't forget, actually came in Thailand.

With all of this in mind I'm drawn to the prospects of Nicolas Colsaerts.

The big-hitting Belgian is entitled to be egged on by the exploits of compatriot Thomas Pieters last week and played quite nicely himself, ranking third for greens in regulation on his way to 26th place.