

Garcia after successful defence in Qatar

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Sergio Garcia, Chasing a defence of the title he won last year

The second leg of the three tournament Middle East European Tour swing begins on Wednesday at the **Peter Harradine** designed Doha Golf Club in Doha in Qatar, the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters being played for the 18th occasion at this venue.

Sergio Garcia defends a title he finally won in 2014 after several near misses. With such a great record on the golf course, the third highest world ranked player in the field should start as favourite despite playing his first event of 2015.

No player in the history of the event has successfully defended his title.

Garcia has become one of the game's most consistent performers missing only one cut in all of 2014. Give he has been inside the top ten in six of his last seven starts in this event then his chances look good.

"I want to play as well as I can and put up a good defence of my title," said the Spaniard. I've started my season in Qatar for the last few years, and I always enjoy coming back.

"I came close to winning a few times, so it was nice to get over the line last year. "I played really well on the last day to get into the play-off, then had to play really well all over again to beat Mikko. So I have some good memories, and hopefully they can inspire me to have another successful week.

"I just feel very comfortable here. The weather's usually great, although it's a bit breezy today. But it's meant to warm up later in the week, so I'm looking forward to playing in my short sleeves with the sun on my back and hopefully a smile on my face."

Henrik Stenson had a great record in this event earlier in his career winning in and finishing runner-up on three occasions in the space of five years in the mid 2000's. He has not played anywhere near as well in recent times to Doha. Stenson surprisingly missed the cut at last week's event in Abu Dhabi but look for a lot of improvement here.

Justin Rose is playing very solidly at present and although he has not played this venue often he finished a reasonable 16th at his last attempt two years ago.

Thorbjorn Olesen finished 3rd in this event last year and has played well enough in recent starts to be a consideration at least this week.

Robert Karlsson flies under the radar to a large extent but he does not seem to be far from where he needs to be to contend and potentially win again on the European Tour. Importantly for his chances Karlsson has won here previously and has produced several other good finishes.

Charl Schwartzel has been close enough in recent starts to believe he could challenge for the title this week. He has not played this event since 2010 but when he has he has done well.

Branden Grace has played this event on only three occasions but has contended on two of those and his recent form has been good enough for that record to build.

Paul Lawrie might be one for longer odds. He has won this event twice, the last of those two years ago and indicated when 20th last week that his game not too far from where it needs to be to for his love affair with the Doha Golf Club to continue.

Five Australians are in the field including Anthony Murdaca who in under three month will play the Masters as a result of his victory at the Asia Pacific Amateur Championship. It would seem that Murdaca is contemplating a professional career although he will be unable to play as a professional until after the Masters.

Richard Green, Marcus Fraser, Scott Hend, Wade Ormsby and Brett Rumford are the other Australians in the field.

Green has not played this event all that well in recent years although earlier he did have several good finishes and played well enough last week for him to be a chance to again be the leading Australian.