

Field released for first RAK Challenge Tour event

Dubai-based teen prodigy Rayhan Thomas gets a sponsor's invite



Haitham Mattar (from left), Rayhan Thomas and Nick Tarratt during the announcing of the field.

Ras Al Khaimah: The field for this week's inaugural Ras Al Khaimah Golf Challenge — the penultimate round of this year's 27-stage European Challenge Tour season — features emerging international talents, seasoned European Tour professionals, Mena Tour event winners and a host of the UAE's best amateur and professional players.

The 105-strong field competes for a share of the US\$350,000 (Dh1.3 million) tournament at Al Hamra Golf Club, Ras Al Khaimah, from Wednesday to Saturday.

Sponsored by the Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA), the field includes European Tour veteran and UAE-resident Johan Edfors, who won the Terre dei Consoli Open Challenge Tour at the beginning of this month, who is currently ranked 33rd in the Challenge Tour standings.

With scores of emerging talents and seasoned European Tour players gunning for glory in RAK, Edfors will be joined by fellow UAE residents Jake Shepherd, 25, a two-time MENA Golf Tour winner, and golf-prodigy Rayhan Thomas, 16, who became the first and youngest amateur to win a Mena Tour event at the Dubai Creek Open last month.

"Although this is my Challenge Tour debut I'm treating it like any other event," said Thomas. "I'm feeling good and I've been playing well for months so I'm not setting targets. I'll just play my usual game and take it shot-by-shot. My iron play is on point at the moment so I'll be looking to capitalise by hitting some good shots and holing some putts. It's been about 18 months since I played the Al Hamra course but I'll play a few practise rounds early next week to get reacquainted with it."

Michael Harradine, another invite, is also joining the field at Al Hamra. Harradine qualified for his spot by winning the Emirates Amateur Open earlier this year. The 34-year-old is the son of Al Hamra's course designer Peter Harradine and holds multiple Emirates Golf Federation Order of Merit titles.

Nick Tarratt, director of the European Tour's Dubai office, said: "It is an exciting time for the Challenge Tour as we prepare to embark on a new territory in Ras Al Khaimah. It is tremendous to be showcasing the emirate through our media platforms and the 46-minute television highlights programme which will be distributed around the world. The Challenge Tour and Ras Al Khaimah have so many common synergies, specifically in terms of the players on our development Tour playing in this growing destination for both golf and other attractions. The emirate is a perfect fit for us and we look forward to a great tournament and then building on that success in the future."

Haitham Mattar, chief executive officer of RAKTDA said: "As an emerging golf destination Ras Al Khaimah is known for its world-class greens and fairways, complemented by the emirate's iconic natural landscape. Hosting such a prestigious European Challenge Tour tournament cements our positioning as an emerging sporting destination, while the other activities visitors can experience surrounding the main event underline our family destination credentials,"

For more information on the tournament and The Road to Oman visit www.europeantour.com/challengetour.