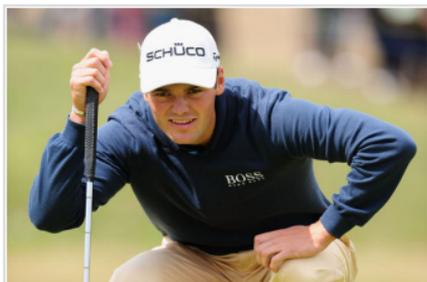


Par Four the course

As the Abu Dhabi HSBC Golf Championship tees off this weekend, we sit down with four of the main contenders – defending champion Martin Kaymer, world number one Luke Donald, Lee Westwood and Darren Clarke – to get their thoughts on the capital's golf classic



Darren Clarke



Martin Kaymer



Luke Donald



Lee Westwood

Martin, you've played some of your best golf here - what is it about Abu Dhabi that inspires you?

MK: I can't say exactly but I just feel very comfortable here. I love the course – it's challenging and exciting and always in perfect condition – but it isn't just that, I feel very at home in front of the crowds. There is always a special buzz at the Abu Dhabi Golf Club as the players return after the winter break and you can feel the excitement of the new season ahead.

You've won the Falcon trophy an amazing three times now. How important is it for you to get your name on the trophy again?

MK: I would love to win again. When you have won at a course three times then you do have a special confidence but I know it will be very tough with so many great players in the field. It's great to start the new season with a win so I would like to get my name on the trophy for sure.

Luke, you're coming off the back of a fantastic season – why have you chosen Abu Dhabi as the place to start the year?

LD: The Abu Dhabi HSBC Golf Championship is now one of the leading tournaments on the European Tour, you just have to look at this year's field to see that. I've always tried to play in great events against the best fields, so playing in Abu Dhabi to start my year off seemed like a natural choice.

What about you Lee – why do you think Abu Dhabi is such a great place to start the season?

LW: There are lots of reasons. The weather is obviously a big factor for a January event and the National is a great golf course and it's a really strong field. I think we all look forward to getting there after the break and getting out on the range in the sunshine and wishing everyone a happy new year. It will also be a great

place to pick up Ryder Cup ranking points – it has really become a 'can't miss' event.

The line-up this year is the strongest ever - how do you rate your chances?

MK: I like my chances but the depth of the field is amazing so I think there is any number of guys who could take the title. But hopefully my 'local' knowledge advantage will help me finish on top!

LD: Every time I tee it up, I'm looking to put myself into contention and give myself a chance to win, just like I will in Abu Dhabi this year. I'm coming off my best year ever, so I'll be looking to continue where I left off.

LW: I finished second there in 2008 so I know that I can play well on the course and after a strong finish to my 2011 season I feel really good about my chances and the year ahead.

DC: I have practised hard over the short break and am hoping to get off to a strong start. There is no doubt I'll have my work cut out with such a strong field but I can only take care of my own golf so will focus on that and not worry about what everyone else is doing. I think I showed at the Open Championship that in any given week, I can come out on top so I will be looking to keep myself in the mix come Sunday afternoon.

What do you think of the Abu Dhabi Golf Club's national course?

MK: Do you need to ask? I love it of course – anywhere where you win three times, you are going to love! I just feel very comfortable there, the course suits my eye and everyone is so welcoming and it will always be a very special place for me.

LD: It is a great championship course – it has some great risk-and-reward holes but more importantly I remember it being in excellent condition and the greens are very true. It's a very fair course, and very much in front of you - there are no tricks to it, the guy who plays the best will win, and I like that about this course.

LW: It's a really good tournament course and the club keeps it in fantastic condition. It's challenging and punishing in places but a really fair test of golf and it always throws up a quality winner.

DC: It is in great condition and the greens are fantastic. I haven't played my best golf there in previous years but am looking to change that this year.

Have you played at any of the other courses in Abu Dhabi?

MK: Unfortunately I have not had the chance to play anywhere else yet...

LD: This is only my second time to Abu Dhabi, so unfortunately I haven't played any of the other courses. I've heard that there are many great courses, and I'm sure over the years I will get to sample some of them.

LW: I played the Yas links which is a great course but for now the National is definitely my favourite...

DC: I played Yas Links last year too, it's another great course – tough but fair.

Will you get the chance to see anything of Abu Dhabi itself?

MK: I won't have much time off as trying to win a fourth title is my main goal for the week. Although I already know Abu Dhabi pretty well, as always I am planning to look around whenever I have some down time from the golf.

LD: I will be doing a photo shoot in the desert but other than that, I will be concentrating on the job at hand. It's a shame as I would love to spend some time getting to see Abu Dhabi, but work is work, and it's a full time job.

LW: I'll definitely be going out to eat a few times. Abu Dhabi has some great restaurants and I really enjoying trying them out and catching up with my friends on Tour over dinner after the winter break.

DC: I'll certainly have a look round but the focus is really going to be on my golf so I won't have too much time. Also, we have everything we could ever want on hand at the Emirates Palace; so mostly I will just be relaxing there.