

ON THE TEE: AT THE COMMERCIAL BANK QATAR MASTERS



Sergio Garcia will launch his defence of the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters in the esteemed company of World Number Two Henrik Stenson and four-time Major winner Ernie Els when play gets under way at Doha Golf Club on Wednesday.

Spaniard Garcia, who finished a close runner-up to Chris Wood in 2013 before triumphing in a play-off over Mikko Ilonen to go one better 12 months ago, will begin his bid to become the first man to retain the coveted Mother of Pearl Trophy from 1155.

With playing partners Els and Stenson, Garcia completes an all-star three-ball – all of whom have prior experience of success around the **Peter Harradine**-designed layout in the Qatari capital – with South African Els having returned victorious in 2005 and Stenson triumphing a year later.

Fresh from a closing 65 and a tied 12th finish at last week's Abu Dhabi HSBC Golf Championship in the UAE, World Number Six Justin Rose tees it up at 0745 alongside former Masters Tournament Champion Charl Schwartzel and Scotland's Stephen Gallacher, who will defend the Dubai Desert Classic crown next week in the final part of The European Tour's annual Desert Swing.

Paul Lawrie has twice claimed victory in Doha and will be looking to make it an unprecedented hat-trick this week, meanwhile, and the Scot will begin that attempt from 1135 on Wednesday with 2010 winner Robert Karlsson and 2009 winner Alvaro Quiros.

In a trio of players already triumphant in the fledgling 2015 Race to Dubai, last week's winner after an enthralling final round in Abu Dhabi, Frenchman Gary Stal, begins his first tournament after securing a maiden European Tour win with another first-time winner, England's Andy Sullivan, plus Branden Grace, who secured his fifth title at the Alfred Dunhill Championship in December, at 0735.

Italian Edoardo Molinari, meanwhile, marshals promising up-and-comers Matthew Fitzpatrick and Thomas Pieters from 0755 after the Belgian put on an impressive showing last weekend in finishing tied fourth in Abu Dhabi.