

PERFECT IN PERTH

One of South Africa's favourite golfing sons packed for Perth – and it's opened new doors

BY MICHAEL VLISMAS

Oliver Bekker's aim was to move to Australia, play two events there as part of an overall process of settling in and slowing down his global playing schedule. That was the plan. The problem came when he won.

'It's funny, because I feel like I'm trying to wind it down a bit but now I've got even more playing opportunities,' he says with a laugh.

Bekker is in a shopping mall in their new hometown of Perth, busy overseeing a game of putt-putt with his kids while chatting about this new phase in his life.

They applied for Australian residency in 2019, but the process was hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic. Then came the confirmation and it was full steam ahead. Bekker entered two tournaments on the PGA Tour of Australasia as part of their settling in process. He arrived for the Western Australia Open unsure about his new environment. After a practice round at Mount Lawley Golf Club in Perth, he was even more unsure about his chances given the different golf course conditions and set-ups compared to what he was used to on the Sunshine Tour and DP World Tour.

'I was seriously worried. The courses in Australia are firm and fast, which I prefer but which we don't play a lot of. If you miss a green the run-offs are crazy and you can be 20 metres away, chipping off seriously tight lies. There's no room for error,' he says.

So he went out and won it. Then he went out and secured himself a place on the Asian Tour.

Suddenly, the man who was looking to take his schedule down a notch, had playing privileges on three tours – the Sunshine Tour, the





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PGA Tour of Australasia and the Asian Tour.

'We've been very fortunate in terms of how things worked out,' he says of the entire move and his new career path there.

'We've always spoken about moving overseas. Europe has so many different cultures and languages. Australia is a bit easier to fit in. We have friends who live here already and we decided to give it a go. There are so many South Africans here and you hear Afrikaans everywhere.'

Bekker will still make the trip to South Africa to compete in Sunshine Tour events. But he predicts his shift in focus towards Asia will significantly lighten the load on his travel schedule.

'For me to go from Perth to Japan is a direct flight of about nine hours, and it's one of the longest I'll have to do. The travel is a lot easier for where I'm going to spend most of my career. I'm 41 now and you've got to think that you don't have that many more productive years in you, so you have to make hay where you can.'

'With my current status I can play about 16 or 17 tournaments, which is more than enough for me at the moment. I don't want to be doing 28 weeks a year anymore. It would be ideal for me to keep my schedule under 20 events a year. I'm over the days of travelling for 200 days a year. If I go play events now, it will be events I want to play and where I can take my family.'

One of the tournaments he's targeted back in South Africa is the

BEST 20 PERFORMANCES

2010

Nasua Masters **T2nd**

2012

Dimension Data Pro-Am **1st**

2013

Nelson Mandela
Championship **T5th**

2016

Sun City Challenge **1st**,
Sun Sibaya Challenge **2nd**

2017

Zambia Sugar Open **1st**,
Zimbabwe Open **3rd**,
Zambia Open **3rd**

2018

The Tour Championship **2nd**

2021

South African Open **2nd**,
British Challenge **2nd**,
Limpopo Championship
T2nd,
Dimension Data Pro-Am **T3rd**,
Euram Bank Open **T3rd**

2022

Catalunya Championship
2nd,
Steyn City Championship
T3rd,
Soudal Open **T4th**

2023

Dimension Data Pro-Am **1st**

2025

Alfred Dunhill Championship
5th,
Western Australian Open **1st**



Investec South African Open, at what was formerly his home course of Stellenbosch Golf Club.

'I'll be pretty confident for that tournament. I haven't played the course many times at all in the past few years and I know it's a completely different golf course now with all the changes. But I've still got that residual knowledge from having played it. I think a lot of people are thinking it will be a bit of a walkover, but I'll be surprised if anybody gets to more than 12 under par.'

A new home and a new focus has clearly unlocked something new in Bekker's game as well.

'I feel like my game is trending back to where it was. I was playing really good golf in 2022 and 2023. Then I went through a patch where I struggled with equipment and finding what worked for me. I thought it was me, but later realised it was the equipment. It was a big learning experience for me. Now I look to equipment first before thinking it's me. I'm now back to what I did well.'



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