

WINNING FORMULA

Beneath the humility and calm demeanour lies a fierce competitor working her way up the ranks

BY CLINTON VAN DER BERG

Picture a toddler, barely three years old, clutching a pint-sized club on the family lawn. That was Zayaan Hendricks' true golf genesis, not the driving range tale, but an even earlier spark from parents who nurtured her curiosity.

By seven, dad Abu formalised it, gifting her a pink hybrid at the range. 'I didn't really enjoy it at first,' the now 17-year-old admits with a chuckle. 'But eventually I learned to love it.'

What followed was a meteoric rise, fuelled by family, resilience, and an unyielding fight that crowned 2025 as a breakthrough year.

Fast-forward to Atlantic Beach Links' Club Championship that same year. Hendricks had threatened before – third, then second – but refused silver again.

In punishing winds, she traded driver bombs for strategy, navigating the links like a veteran.

'It meant a lot to me,' she reflected. 'I played quite strategically, to my strengths.'

It was a microcosm of her growth: humble roots yielding ferocious wins. Her confidence surged palpably in 2025, transforming a well-raised girl proud of her Muslim culture and traditions into a force. Mom and dad remain her rocks, instilling values that blend quiet faith with relentless drive.

At the Western Province annual awards, the accolades piled up: SAGDB Player of the Year, leading player on the amateur tour, top





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junior in WP, and MVP at the SA Women's IPT for WP. Four trophies gleamed under the lights, testament to her dominance.

She's Western Province's number one junior girl, Nomads SA Girls captain, and now named to the Women's Presidents Team for the 2026 GolfRSA International Amateur Championship.

'It means a lot,' she says. 'It really shows all the hard work that's been done and everything's kind of just paying off.' Yet Hendricks stays humble.

'She's incredibly modest,' agrees mentor Sarah Braude, adding that a real fighter simmers beneath. In matchplay, if she drops a hole, she'll claw back, as resilient as the coastal gales she masters.

Braude, past president of Women's Golf South Africa, joined Hendricks' interview to amplify her story. 'She is naturally a calm person. That's a strength that makes her stand out,' Braude says. 'Sometimes it doesn't take a lot of bravado.'

Far from supposedly shy, Hendricks spoke with veteran poise: articulate, confident, eyes alight.

Atlantic Beach shaped her. 'Playing in the wind teaches you to accept challenges, and adapt,' she notes.

The support of Atlantic Beach's Grow Golf Academy helped, but dad Abu's support echoes loudest: 'He's always been there, my number one supporter.'



SHORT PUTTS

Favourite course:

Gary Player Country Club.

Superstitions?W

hen I play a tournament or any social game, if I start the first hole really badly, I usually have a really great round, so I kind of want to start the first hole badly. I think I get more focused after that, and I play quite well.

Favourite food:

Mum's butter chicken.

If you could have a dream four ball with any three people, living or dead, who would you choose?

Rory McIlroy, my favourite sports person. My dad, and my sister Aminah, who's also part of the Atlantic Beach Academy programme and a member of the WP junior squad.



Rivalries sharpen her edge. Friends like Kaitlyn van de Vyver and Pheny Sabata create 'a really good rivalry which pushes us to play well,' she says. 'We respect each other on and off the course.'

In the Western Province Nomads Junior Girls Championship, tough conditions loomed, but her mental game is something of a secret superpower, a cool composure that turns chaos into clarity.

'I don't really go into a panic state,' she explains of high-pressure moments like the Nomads Championship. 'I just step back and breathe and calm myself down because when I'm calm, I can think better and make wiser decisions.'

Bad holes don't snowball; she resets deliberately, taking 'one shot at a time' without score obsession – in golf's mental minefield, Hendricks' poise is pure gold. It's no accident: years of practice built this discipline, keeping negativity at bay. Braude calls it her standout trait: 'She's naturally a calm person, a brilliant strength in the sport.'

Braude spotlights her leadership too. As Nomads captain, Hendricks balanced contention and team duties in the final group. The girls rallied – 'We'll behave, you focus on golf' – affording her quiet command.





‘That’s the quiet respect Zee earns,’ Braude adds. Hendricks’ resilience shines here too; she fights back without fanfare, her humility masking the fire.

Matric year tests her balance – school, golf, gym – all mapped on a whiteboard schedule, so she does ‘... not slack in certain things because I’m prioritising others,’ she explains.

Downtime means family, friends, movies, cherishing bonds rooted in her cultural pride. In a community scarce on golf heroes, her honours inspire, something which she says is ‘A great privilege.’

Long-term here goals are lofty but simple: pro on the Sunshine Tour, then Europe, then the LPGA Tour. US college tempts, perhaps, but the local tour calls and she has the golfing arsenal for it.

For aspiring juniors, Hendricks’ advice is simple but deep: ‘Just keep pushing. What’s more important is how you come back from (bad rounds).’

In a sport of endless adversity, this relentless 17-year-old – calm, strategic, unbreakable – is redefining prodigy.

A Cape storm gathering force.