



# LOCKED AND LOADED

Armed with renewed confidence after winning a 13th Sunshine Tour title, the never-say-die South African is primed to shine again on the international stage

BY MICHAEL VLISMAS

If three golf holes could ever define a person, then holes 16, 17 and 18 at Serengeti Estates during The Serengeti Playoffs last season served as a mirror to the man that is Daniel van Tonder.

Van Tonder produced a scintillating finish in that event which saw him birdie the 16th, eagle the par-four 17th after he drove the green, and birdie the 18th to win this title on the Sunshine Tour's Courier Guy Playoffs series.

The smile when he rolled in that long birdie putt on 18 said it all. Yes, he'd won by two strokes with a 63. But more than the win, it was the way in which he won that brought him the greatest pleasure.

'There was an opportunity – and I could sense it,' he said.

Those words, if you know a bit about Daniel van Tonder – where he's come from and the challenges of a tough childhood which he's overcome – carry immense meaning.

The 2021 SA Open Champion gave a bit more context to that as he prepared to fly to China for the recent Volvo China Open and another season on the DP World Tour after earning those playing rights through the Sunshine Tour and the HotelPlanner Tour last season.

'I never had anything to fall back on. I've only ever had golf,' he says. Van Tonder has had to fight for everything he has today. He's been knocked down so hard in life, most people would never have found the will to get back up. And you would never say it when you see the



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broad smile on the fairways, the Shaka surfing hand gesture he loves to throw to the cameras, and the incredible husband and father he is today.

But the fight still comes out on the golf course. It's where he loves to channel it. And it's what he plays the game for.

At Serengeti Estates last season, he went into those final three holes like a bull shark that had just smelt blood on the current.

'That win at Serengeti, where I was two or three shots behind with three to play – that was the best feeling I've ever had of winning a tournament. That finish. I love the high of that battle,' he says.

This year, Van Tonder is hoping to take that ability to attack and combine it with a more experienced approach as he prepares for another shot at DP World Tour success.

'The big thing I've learnt about playing on the DP World Tour is not to stay out there when you're struggling. Come home, start over and figure it out. When I had and lost my card before, I was away and searching for something the whole time. Every week it's a different country and different course. So you think you've figured out something one week, and then the next week you're searching again. I've learnt the hard way that if you're struggling, come home, work on it, and go back and actually be in contention, rather than playing on the cut line the whole time, receiving no points and losing your card that way.'



## CAREER WINS

### 2014

Royal Swazi Open, Vodacom Origins Of Golf – Euphoria

### 2019

Zambia Open

### 2020

Royal Swazi Open, Sunshine Tour Championship, Vodacom Championship Unlocked, Vodacom Championship Reloaded

### 2021

South African Open, Kenya Savannah Classic

### 2024

Gary & Vivienne Player Challenge, Eswatini Challenge

### 2025

My GolfLife Open, SDC Open

### 2026

The Serengeti Playoffs





He already made a good start to the 2026 year with a pair of consecutive sixth-place finishes in the Joburg Open and Investec South African Open in March. And his ability to compete at the highest level showed itself in last December's Nedbank Golf Challenge in honour of Gary Player, where he finished tied 10th in a strong DP World Tour field.

The confidence from those experiences on familiar fairways is what Van Tonder will now take to the international stage with him.

'I'm very excited about it. I think the biggest growth area of my game has been my ability to scramble, and turn a bad round into a level-par round, or a one-under-par round.'

Van Tonder has been scrambling in life since before he could walk. Then one day he walked onto a driving range at Mount Edgecombe during a Sunshine Tour event, saw a girl selling coffee and decided to talk to her. Abi became his wife and the absolute rock upon which he's been able to build a life as one of the Sunshine Tour's most thrilling players to watch.

And there's a definite sense that Daniel van Tonder is about to find his true competitive arena to fuel that fighting spirit on the DP World Tour this season.

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## NUMBERS GAME

### 22

Most consecutive cuts he has made on the Sunshine Tour

### 62

Lowest tournament round – 2024 Sun Wild Coast Sun Challenge

### 71

Highest world ranking he has achieved – 23 Jan 2022

### 81 Cuts

he has made on the DP World Tour

### 144 Starts

on the DP World Tour – 27 in 2022

### 25m

The amount, in rands, he has earned on the Sunshine Tour

