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CAN RORY GET OFF TO A FLYING START?

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ARABIAN GOLF – THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE LEADING CLUBS IN THE REGION

The COURSE

Doha's Desert Delight

Time to shake off the rust and get back to business. With three of the region's most prestigious courses trimmed and primed, the stage is set for some of the best players in the world to prove their worth under the Arabian sun. It's the European Tour's three-tournament Desert Swing.

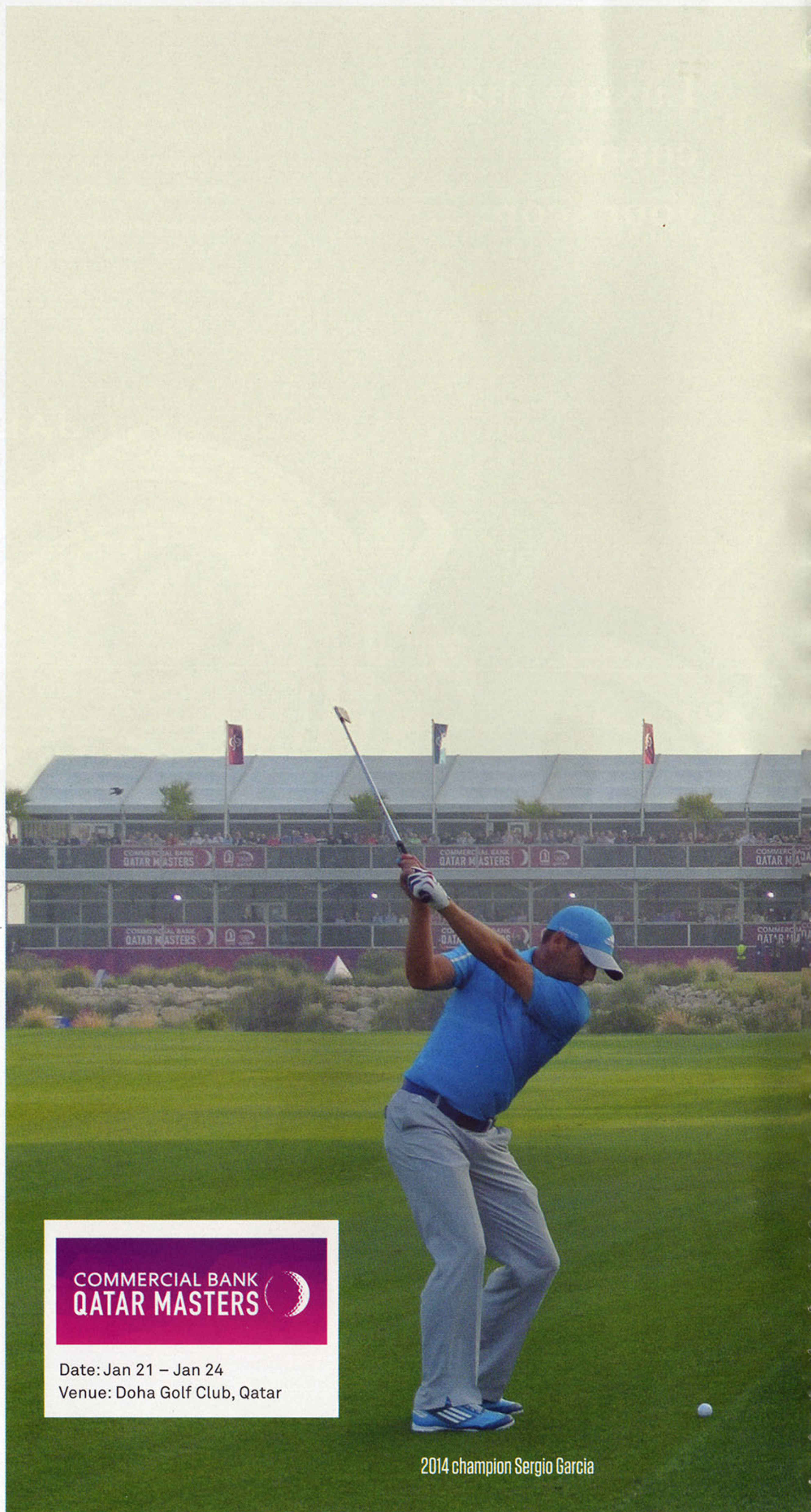
THE winners of the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters reads like a Who's Who of golf with the likes of Sergio Garcia, Adam Scott, Ernie Els, Retief Goosen, Paul Lawrie and Thomas Bjørn all triumphing over Peter Harradine's famous Doha Golf Club layout.

The par-5 closing hole isn't one of the longest in the Middle East and many an eagle putt has dropped – most notably Chris Wood's to win in 2013 and in 2007 when double US Open winner Goosen rolled in a curling 50-footer to clinch the title.

Australian Scott became the first two-time winner of the event when he followed his first win in 2002 with a second in 2008 and Lawrie collected his second win in 2012, 13 years after he first won in Doha.

The Desert Swing events have long been seen as an excellent place to get back into action after the winter break because of the superb practice facilities in the region and the excellent condition of the courses.

All that adds up to the fact that genuine world-class superstars are here to play and it equates to three unmissable events.



**COMMERCIAL BANK
QATAR MASTERS** 

Date: Jan 21 – Jan 24
Venue: Doha Golf Club, Qatar

2014 champion Sergio Garcia

Who will tame Doha this year?



Henrik Stenson

Hot on the heels of his win at the DP World Tour Championship in Dubai in November, Stenson is back at the venue where he won his third European Tour title, in 2006. Simply put, the Swede loves it in the Middle East, having won three times in Dubai and once in Doha.



Justin Rose

England's top-ranked player has yet to win in the Middle East but he's come close many times. He was runner-up to Stenson at the previous two season-closing DP World Tour Championships and was runner-up in Abu Dhabi two years ago.



Sergio Garcia

Defending Champion Sergio Garcia had a superb year in 2014 and it all began with victory in Qatar. He was runner-up at The Open and as one of the most popular players on the circuit he is a worthy winner anywhere around the globe.



Victor Dubuisson

Another European Ryder Cup hero emerged at Gleneagles in the form of enigmatic Frenchman Victor Dubuisson. The reserved 24-year-old lets his clubs do the talking and a fine all-round game sets him up nicely to become a regular winner on Tour.



Ernie Els

South African stalwart Ernie Els has won tournaments all over the world and it came as no surprise when he added the Qatar Masters to his collection in 2005. The Big Easy last won in 2013 in Germany and had three top tens last year.



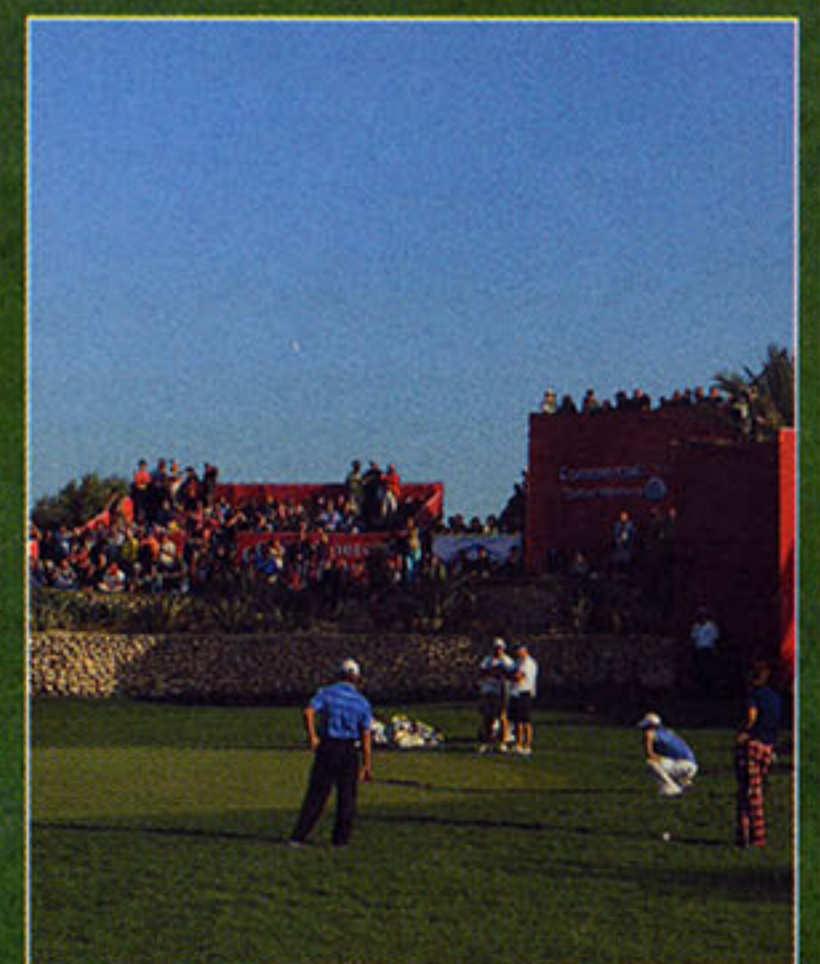
Charl Schwartzel

Former Masters champion Charl Schwartzel is making his first outing in Doha since 2010. He hasn't finished outside the top 25 in the tournament since 2004. The South African always starts the year strongly so look for him to contend.



The Course

OPENED in 1996 and designed by the renowned Peter Harradine, Doha Golf Club has played host to the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters since 1998. Wind is a big factor because palm trees are scarce and water comes into play one holes 3, 8, 9, 13, 15 and 18. The card of the course is a lengthy 7,400 yards but it only plays long if the rough is up and the wind is gusting.



The famous Falcon Trophy has slipped through the fingers of some of the biggest names in the game with Rory McIlroy, Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson all coming close in recent years.

The tournament always has a stellar field and this year, its tenth anniversary, Rory McIlroy and Rickie Fowler are headlining the show alongside the likes of Henrik Stenson and three-time former champion Martin Kaymer.

For many of the game's biggest names, Abu Dhabi represents their first taste of competition for well over a month and they'll be hoping the warmth of the region can quickly ease their muscles back into action.

Abu Dhabi's likely lads...



Rory McIlroy

Had a truly epic 2014 with two Major wins and a WGC – can he get 2015 off to a flyer?



Rickie Fowler

Finished in the top five of all four Majors in 2014 Fowler is fast maturing into one of the most exciting talents in the game.



Martin Kaymer

The German knows the National Course inside out with three wins, so another victory would come as no surprise.

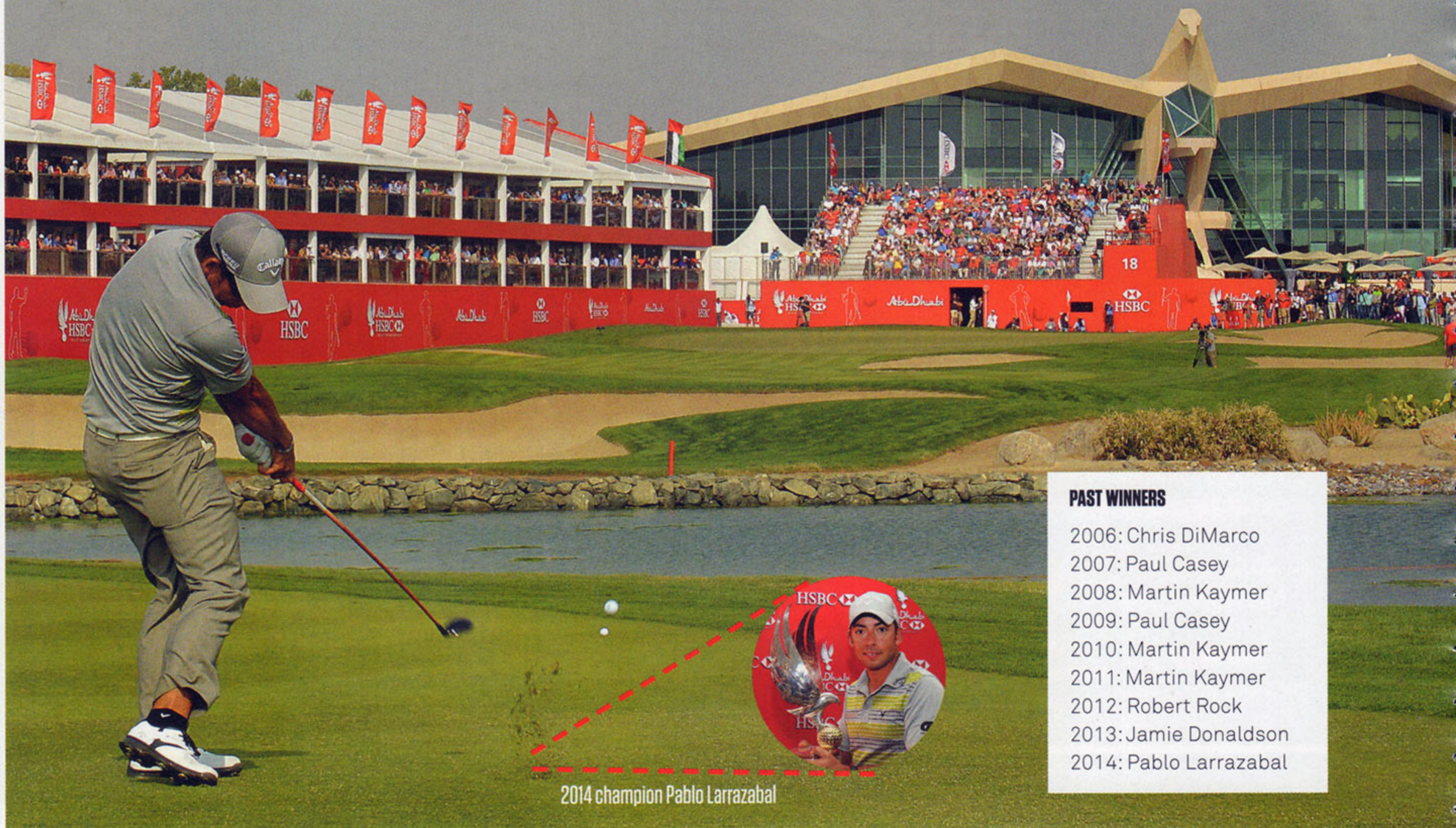


Matteo Manassero

The Abu Dhabi Ambassador loves the place, crediting some relaxing practice on the National Course as the catalyst for his win at the 2012 Singapore Open.

The Course

Another of Peter Harradine's designs, the National Course at Abu Dhabi Golf Club opened for play in 1998 with the first Abu Dhabi HSBC Golf Championship taking place in 2006. The course is relatively flat but it's very long and is usually set up similarly to the US Open with a premium on accuracy off the tee and from the approach. Probably the most difficult of the three courses on the Middle East Swing, it's a bomber's paradise but it has been known to throw up some surprising winners – most notably in the last few years when Robert Rock and Pablo Larrazabal triumphed.



2014 champion Pablo Larrazabal

PAST WINNERS

2006: Chris DiMarco
2007: Paul Casey
2008: Martin Kaymer
2009: Paul Casey
2010: Martin Kaymer
2011: Martin Kaymer
2012: Robert Rock
2013: Jamie Donaldson
2014: Pablo Larrazabal