

Golfweek

By: **Alistair Tait** | January 21, 2017 7:05 am

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates – Dustin Johnson finally woke up and realized he wasn't actually in the Middle East but maybe Arizona or Palm Springs. Maybe that explains why he went around the Abu Dhabi Golf Course in 8-under 64.

Either that or he finally shook off the winter rust, or realized you need to deliver the goods when you're paid a seven-figure sum to turn up in Abu Dhabi for the first time.

(By the way, Johnson isn't the only one on appearance money this week. Defending champion Rickie Fowler, Henrik Stenson, Martin Kaymer and Danny Willett also got quite a bit more than what's available from the prize fund. Their total appearance fees probably exceed the \$2.7 million purse. So it goes in the Middle East.)

Johnson justified his appearance money with six birdies and an eagle to move to 12 under for 54 holes. He enters the final round one shot off the lead held by England's Tyrell Hatton. He is tied for second along with Kiradech Aphibarnrat of Thailand, 2014 champion Pablo Larrazabal, Englishman Tommy Fleetwood and three time-time champion Martin Kaymer.

Johnson went 43 holes before he got the better of a par-5 hole. After nine straight pars on the three-shot holes, he finally enjoyed par-5 success with an eagle at the eighth when he chipped in from just over the back of the green.

That didn't open the floodgates. The U.S. Open champion parred both the par-5, 10th and 18th holes coming in. Thankfully, he made up for it with three straight birdies from the 15th.

"Tomorrow I definitely need to take advantage of the par 5s, everything else I'm playing pretty well," he said. "Generally I make a lot of birdies on the par 5s."

Characteristically, Johnson didn't let his failure spoil the last three days.

"It is what it is," he said. "It's fine. I'll make 4 birdies tomorrow. It will be all right."

Johnson didn't get much of a chance to get to know the 7,583-yard layout during the practice rounds. "I only got to play it one time. I played the front nine once and then only the back nine once before I teed it up. I think it's a course you need to play a few times to get the exact lines you need to take off the tees and stuff."

He didn't really need to get to know the layout. Although Swiss architect **Peter Harradine** designed Abu Dhabi, it looks like it belongs in a couple of locations in the United States.

"Palm Springs, Arizona, all the desert courses," Johnson replied when asked to compare the Abu Dhabi Golf Club to other Desert courses he's played. "To me they're all the same."

No wonder he finally feels at home in the Middle East.