

WILLIAMS SHINES IN SHARJAH SHOWPIECE

THE inaugural Sharjah Senior Golf Masters presented by Shurooq reached a thrilling conclusion as South Africa's Chris Williams claimed his first title in six years at the first hole of a sudden-death play-off against Englishman Gary Marks.

"Words fail me. After eight years on the Tour to finally getting my second win is just amazing," said Williams, whose last victory came at the Aberdeen Brunei Senior Masters presented by Stapleford Forum.

"I've been playing well and scoring well in South Africa leading up to this event, playing in as many Pro-Ams as I could to keep my game sharp. So that gave me a lot of confidence going into this week."

Like all the players in the field, Williams was highly impressed by the Peter Harradine-designed course at Sharjah Golf & Shooting Club – the first time a Senior Tour event had been played on a nine-hole layout.

"The course was amazing, the fairways were very good and the greens were magnificent," said the 57-year-old. "Everybody I've spoken to enjoyed playing this golf course. We didn't know how a nine-hole course was going to work but it's been tremendous and it really gives you food for thought."

The event also marked the first time the European Senior Tour had visited the emirate of Sharjah and its first return to the UAE since the Abu Dhabi European Seniors Tour Championship in 2000. If they were looking to

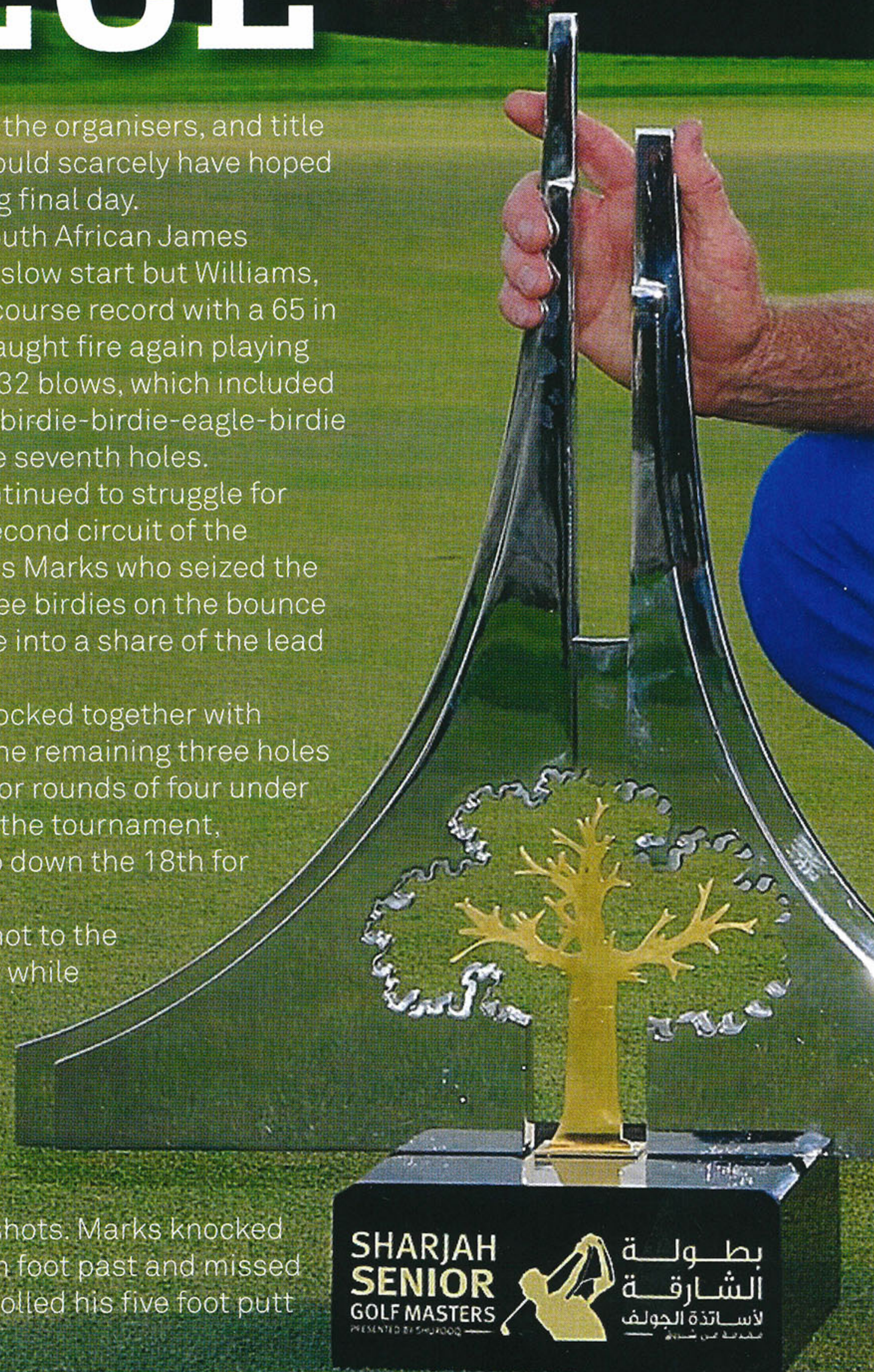
make an impression, the organisers, and title sponsors Shurooq, could scarcely have hoped for a more captivating final day.

Overnight leader, South African James Kingston, got off to a slow start but Williams, who had broken the course record with a 65 in the opening round, caught fire again playing the front nine in just 32 blows, which included a spellbinding run of birdie-birdie-eagle-birdie from the fourth to the seventh holes.

But as Kingston continued to struggle for momentum on the second circuit of the nine-hole track, it was Marks who seized the initiative, carding three birdies on the bounce from 13 to 15 to move into a share of the lead with Williams.

The pair remained locked together with matching pars over the remaining three holes before each signing for rounds of four under 68, 13-under 203 for the tournament, meaning a return trip down the 18th for a play-off.

Marks hit his tee-shot to the middle of the fairway while Williams, just as he did in regulation play, found the light rough on the left. Both players were on the edge of the green with their approach shots. Marks knocked his putt around seven foot past and missed the return. Williams rolled his five foot putt





David MacLaren

Head of the European Senior Tour

"The inaugural Sharjah Senior Golf Masters presented by Shurooq was an unqualified success. Every aspect of the tournament was world class and our players were consistent in their praise of both facilities and hospitality. We look forward to returning to Sharjah Golf and Shooting Club in 2018 and to again bringing the many features of Sharjah to a global TV audience".

past and sunk his follow-up for par and victory. "I got off to a great start today," said Williams. "I was five under through seven holes and then Gary came back with three birdies on the back nine. But nothing is easy out here, and you've got to work hard for these wins no matter where they are."

Marks, who revealed that he hadn't played much golf over the close season, was disappointed not to close out the victory but said he could take plenty of positives from his performance as the opening event of the 2017 season.

"I suddenly caught up with about three or four holes to play and the prospect of getting into a play-off, or winning, became a reality," said Marks.

"For two thirds of the round Chris had a good lead and was three or four shots clear of me at one point after his spurt on the front nine. I was just trying to hold on and hole some putts, which wasn't really happening. Then I made three birdies on the trot and Chris dropped a shot so the complexion of the game changed completely.

"I was thrilled to get into the play-off. It was obviously an unfortunate way for it to end for me, but it was much more than I could have hoped for coming into the tournament as I hadn't been playing before this week."

Last season's Order of Merit runner-up and Rookie of the Year, Magnus Atlevi, joined Kingston in third place at 12-under



Left to right: John Mills (amateur winner), H.E. Marwan bin Jassim Al Sarkal (CEO Shurooq), Chris Williams (professional winner), Sheikh Sultan bin Ahmad Al Qasimi (Chairman of the Sharjah Media Council), H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Thani (Vice President, Sharjah Golf & Shooting Club), Peter Harradine (course designer), David MacLaren (Head of the European Senior Tour), Ahmad Al Qasir, (COO Shurooq), Martin Duff (Director of Golf Sharjah Golf & Shooting Club).

par while England's Roger Chapman finished fifth at 10-under and reigning European Senior Tour Number One Paul Broadhurst finished sixth at nine under.

H.E. Marwan Bin Jassim Al Sarkal - CEO of title sponsors the Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq) said: "I congratulate Chris Williams for being the hero of the championship and have nothing but praise for the high level of performance of all the players in the field this week.

"It's been a great achievement by Sharjah in hosting and organising this event, which has attracted some of the Senior Tour's best players. We thank the European Senior Tour and all the partners and sponsors who contributed to making the event such a success."

Sheikh Mohamed Al Thani, Vice President of Sharjah Golf and Shooting Club said: "We feel proud and honoured to be the host venue for the Sharjah Senior Golf Masters presented by Shurooq which reflects on the stature of the emirate of Sharjah, which is one of the best destinations for golf and championships in the world."

Williams echoed the sentiments of the players in the field when he commended the success of the inaugural Sharjah Senior Golf Masters and talked of his optimism that this week's event could be the first step towards the establishment of a Senior Middle East Swing to mirror the highly popular three-event Swing on the regular Tour.

"I'd love to see around seven events out here but this is a good start and this is how it happens, by opening doors

Pos	Name	Nation	To Par	R1	R2	R3	Total	Prize Money
1	Chris Williams	RSA	-13	65	70	68	203	€ 59,550
2	Gary Marks	ENG	-13	67	68	68	203	€ 39,700
3	Magnus P Atlevi	SWE	-12	66	71	67	204	€ 24,812
3	James Kingston	RSA	-12	68	66	70	204	€ 24,812
5	Roger Chapman	ENG	-10	70	67	69	206	€ 17,984
6	Paul Broadhurst	ENG	-9	70	67	70	207	€ 15,880
7	André Bossert	SUI	-8	67	71	70	208	€ 14,292
8	Stephen Dodd	WAL	-7	68	71	70	209	€ 11,380
8	Santiago Luna	ESP	-7	70	70	69	209	€ 11,380
8	Steen Tinning	DEN	-7	66	71	72	209	€ 11,380



Runner-up Gary Marks in action on the immaculately presented nine-hole Sharjah Golf & Shooting Club course.

and establish contacts. This region is a Mecca for golf. People come from all over the world to play in the UAE. There are a lot of courses and some great players have taken up residence in the area so there's no reason the Senior Tour can't go forward from here."

Sharjah's successful first foray into the

world of professional tour golf sent a powerful message to the golging world that there's a new popular venue on the scene and the inaugural Sharjah Senior Golf Masters presented by Shurooq heralded the start of what promises to be an exciting new dawn for the European Senior Tour in the region.