

# KING LEOPOLD III CHALLENGE

*Royal Limburg GC / Spiegelven GC / July 10-13, 2017*

The par-5  
18th hole at  
Spiegelven.



**T**here were more trophies won by the South African contingent on this biennial visit to Belgium. Not quite the magnificent glory of Waterloo 2015, when the two teams had captured the main prizes in the both the net (1-2) and gross divisions, but a reasonable haul nonetheless.

This time, playing on courses in the north-east of the country near the city of Genk (an hour's motorway drive from Brussels, close to the border with Germany), the A team of captain Stuart Morris, Pete Bailey, Stuart McLean and Dave Horak were runners-up in the net competition, while McLean won the salver for the best gross individual score on the final day.

More salvers than usual were handed out by the tournament's new organising committee from the ARGSB (Association Royale de Golfeurs Seniors de Belgique to give them their full title). They had a new president and captain. While

previously only the winners had received salvers, on this 31st occasion of the King Leopold all the teams who finished on the podium (1-2-3) were in receipt of mementos to take home with them.

While the South African B team of Pete Lloyd, Howard Garmany, Doug Aitken and Chris Allen suffered intense disappointment in their defence of the net title they had won two years previously, falling all the way to the opposite end of the leaderboard, it was a most enjoyable week from a social outlook, equal to those before it. This was plainly evident in the way the team and their wives went into party mode on the final

night, splurging their euro notes in one of Genk's leading restaurants.

While the B team had retained their winning combination, the A team showed two changes from 2015, with Dave Horak (Randfontein, Gauteng) and Pete Bailey (Prince's Grant and Plettenberg Bay) making their debut appearances in the tournament. Horak paired up with McLean, and Bailey with Morris. They were both accompanied by their wives, Vivian and Magda respectively. While Anne Allen had been the only woman at Waterloo, this year she had plenty of company for the women's programme (including golf). Pete Lloyd's

wife Wendy also made the Channel crossing from England.

The girls had an unusual outing to C-Mine in Genk, a disused coal mine that has been transformed into a cultural and tourist venue, with an added underground experience. Genk is a key industrial centre in the Flanders region, and has stayed that way despite the closure of the coal mines and also a Ford motor plant.

The tour party was again a close knit group of people, with everyone reuniting in the golf clubhouse bar of the Hotel Stiermerheide on the Sunday afternoon of tournament week, and quickly getting into the spirit of the occasion with beer and wine arriving at the table in copious amounts, followed by dinner on the outside deck of the restaurant. This year the tournament was from Monday to Thursday.

## SPIEGELVEN

Our hotel, a short distance from Genk in beautiful forested countryside which contained numerous cycling and walking trails, was on the site of the Spiegelven Golf Club, which had both an 18-hole course and a Par 3 course. Both looked to be popular and busy. Having hotel rooms – albeit smallish with tiny balconies – at one of the golfing venues was a decided plus, in that it helped cut back on travelling. It was where, conveniently, the organisers held their welcome cocktail party, the tournament dinner, and prizegiving.

With the nearest restaurants being in Genk, the team spent three of the five evenings dining at the hotel, which offered excellent well-priced food and a convivial atmosphere. It became even more lively and agreeable later on in the evenings when Pete Bailey produced a

bottle of McCallan whisky which was popularly received by all. A friendly waiter was happy to provide glasses.

A highlight of the breakfast buffet each morning was a state-of-the-art orange juice squeezer! It grabbed everyone's attention. You would throw a few oranges into the machine and within seconds watch your glass being filled. A refreshing start to the day.

The route from reception to the car park passed a splendid modernistic building which housed De Kristalijn restaurant, beautifully decorated inside and boasting a Michelin star (plus three forks, which measures the "quality of the experience"). But only the American team ventured in there to dine as far as we could ascertain. With a baked partridge main dish costing in the region of R950, and appetizers set at R500, it wasn't considered a particularly enticing venue for our budget. Although the budget did get hurled out the window on the final night. More to come on that later.

There was some concern among a few members of the team (notably the scribe, Golf Digest editor Stuart McLean) when it was noticed that the Spiegelven course was hosting two rounds of the 54-hole King Leopold competition, with only one round at the more famous Royal Limburg GC nearby. This seemed contrary to past experiences, where the premier course was the headquarters. While Royal Limburg is regarded by many locals as one of the best in Belgium – No 2 on the website Top100golfcourses.com – Spiegelven doesn't feature on any ranking lists. Having played two magnificent courses in 2015, what were we in for?

In fact, Spiegelven turned out to be a superb parkland layout, in excellent condition, with a variety of interesting holes, if perhaps too challenging for many of the senior competitors. It hosted the final day singles Stableford, and the average



The first hole at Spiegelven.



The clubhouse at Royal Limburg.

## SA TOUR PARTY

Doug Aitken - KZN/Mt Edgecombe

Chris Allen - EP/Humewood

Anne Allen

Pete Bailey - KZN/Prince's Grant

Magda Bailey

Howard Garmany - S Cape/Plettenberg Bay

Dave Horak - Gauteng/Randfontein

Vivian Horak

Pete Lloyd - Gauteng/CC JHB

Wendy Lloyd

Stuart McLean - WP/King David Mowbray

Stuart Morris - Gauteng/River Club



The two South Africans teams, above from left, Dave Horak, Stuart McLean, Howard Garmany, Pete Lloyd, Pete Bailey, Chris Allen, Doug Aitken, Stuart Morris. Below, Magda Bailey, Vivian Horak, Wendy Lloyd and Anne Allen.



score from the 100 players in the tournament on a beautiful summer's day was 26.4. Not only were the greens tricky, as were some pin positions, but the course narrowly threaded its way through tight tree-lined holes on the shorter front

nine, before transforming itself into a long test of more than 3 000 metres on the back nine.

We learned that the course was by American course architect Ron Kirby, who for many years partnered Gary

Player, and helped him build the original course at Sun City. Kirby sold his design firm to Golden Bear, and was working for Nicklaus Design when in 1988 he opened Spiegelven, which borders a nature reserve known as Spiegelken van den Hemel – “Mirror of Heaven.”

## THE LINE UP

The eight team members arrived in Genk from different points of the compass on the Sunday. The Horaks had been visiting blueberry farms in Holland – Dave and Vivian have one of their own in Gauteng – the Allens were driving through from Frankfurt Airport, and the Baileys were on trains, the Eurostar from London to Brussels, and then a slower milk run to Genk. The Lloyds were giving the two hitchhikers, Aitken and Garmany, a lift over from England, while the two Stuarts were meeting up at Brussels Airport. McLean had arrived the previous week, to visit the World War One memorial sites near Ypres, so it was his task to collect the captain at the airport.

For future reference, let it be said that



arranging to meet someone at Zaventem Airport is not something to be discussed lightly. This is such a complex rabbit warren of a building, and so tightly guarded in terms of security (as a result of the 2016 terrorist attack) that you need to have a specific meeting point – not just a general “outside the Arrivals area.” Passengers cannot easily be dropped off or collected as you do at airports in South Africa, or even at Heathrow. It was by some fluke that the two Stuarts connected in the building after McLean had parked his rental car back in the Europcar area and gone in search of the captain.

## DAY 1 THE WARM-UP MATCH

The entire South African eight-man contingent had been invited to join up with the United States and Canadian teams for the traditional 16-a-side match against Europe on the Monday of tournament week. The USA and Canada had each only sent one team this year. This was the curtain-raiser to the King Leopold tournament, and gave everyone a chance to play at Koninklijke Limburg, the private members club that celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2016.

Limburg was a mix of heathland and parkland holes on a beautiful moorland site, surrounded by woodland and fields. The smallish clubhouse resembled a private home in terms of size and atmosphere; the men’s locker room being situated in the basement, the women’s upstairs in the roof. Most of the space was taken up by the bar and lounge where we dined in the evening after the match and the captains meeting. The catering at the club was excellent.

We were all impressed by the club’s practice facilities, efficient and compact, with outdoor and indoor bays. Most fascinating to watch were the two flattish robot vehicles which silently prowled the range retrieving golf balls. Known as the Ball Picker, it is the only robotic ball collector in the world. Once the ball tank is full, they move to a docking station where they unload the balls and recharge their batteries.

From our visits to the King Leopold over the years, it’s noticeable that Belgium golf clubs generally all have excellent practice areas, and Limburg was one of the most polished. By contrast, the range at Spiegelven, although handy



Top to bottom: Dinner on the outside deck at Hotel Stiernerheide; Range ball picker docking at Royal Limburg; An unusual golf cart.

in proximity to the first tee, was tatty, and competitors had to pay for buckets of balls.

The Limburg course, another Fred Hawtree design (he also did those at Royal Waterloo), began in open heathland and then moved into a forest of pine and birch trees, holes which required accuracy off the tee to have any shot at the greens. The holes were mostly flat, but some had interesting undulations. The high number of doglegs was a feature. Trees lined both sides of virtually every hole other than a few in one stretch of the property, Nos 6 to 9, and then the attractive par-5 18th, which swung down a slight incline towards the clubhouse.

The match format was singles match play in fourballs, with points being allocated for first nine, back nine and overall results, and it ended in a 24-24 half. The South Africans contributed 14 of the points, a pretty good percentage. The four Canadians earned 7½ points though, and we were all aware of how good their players were, including some long hitters. They had three single-figure handicaps, with a highest handicap of 10.

## DAY 2 GREENSOMES

A change to the order of play saw us playing Greensomes on the first day, instead of the traditional Betterball, and this was also given an extra modification compared to previous events. Greensomes is normally two partners each teeing off and putting a ball in play, then choosing one of those balls, before finishing the hole playing alternate shots.

The King Leopold version of Greensomes allowed everyone to hit both a tee shot and a second shot before switching to foursomes. This proved popular and also markedly improved the scores. Playing at Spiegelven, the leading score was 44 points by the German pairing of Lutz Donner and Gutmann Habig, a level par round of golf off a handicap of 8. The next best score was the 40 points recorded by the partnership of Stuart McLean and Dave Horak, signing for a 77 gross off a 9 handicap.

As usual, the South African team had had their regular handicaps slashed for the tournament – unlike at home, there is a difference between actual handicaps



Top to bottom: Summer evening on the deck;  
The first hole at Spiegelven; The clubhouse at Spiegelven.



and playing handicaps – something which we now have come to terms with. Although probably not Pete Lloyd, who found his handicap cut by as many as 10 shots! Struggling with his golf game as he was, that seriously curtailed his competitiveness during the week. However, the entry requirements did stipulate a maximum handicap of 18, and playing handicaps were determined from that figure.

Doug Aitken, Chris Allen and Howard Garmany were also not amused by the cuts they endured. Could this excessive pruning have been the result of their team's runaway 2015 victory at Waterloo, when they had an impressively high total of 259 points and won by 15?

There were 25 teams competing this year, eight from the hosts, and three from Germany, with two each from South Africa, France, Luxembourg, Portugal, Netherlands and Great Britain, and one from Canada and USA.

The Belgium 4 team had the best total on day one, with 74 points. The Canadian team of Kevin Whelly (5 handicap), Michael Horrocks (8), who had 39 points together, and Edmund Pottinger (10) and Philip Byrne (5), were just one point adrift.

### DAY 3 BETTERBALL

After a run of beautiful sunny days, the Wednesday dawned unpromisingly, with rain falling steadily on the drive to Limburg. It cleared momentarily for the early starters, but the weather took a turn for the worse as a windstorm passed through the area during the morning.

Dave Horak and Stuart McLean were playing the exposed par-5 fifth hole when they were lashed by rain and a powerful wind. Everyone was getting soaked. One of their Belgium playing partners lost the grip on his umbrella, and it tumbled away down the fairway, racing away from its pursuer. It only stopped when caught by the group following.

Scoring was difficult, and although there were breaks in the weather, the rain persisted most of the day, making for a miserable time. Disappointing to be playing such a good course when cold and huddled under an umbrella most of the way round.

The best Betterball score was 41 points



Top to bottom: Celebrating in the clubhouse bar at Spiegelven;  
First tee sign at Spiegelven; The prizegiving table.

The South African A team with their salvers. From left, Pete Bailey, Stuart McLean, Stuart Morris, Dave Horak.



terrific finishing hole in front of the clubhouse, and provided entertaining watching during the day as competitors dealt with it in a fascinating multitude of ways. After a good drive you needed to get as close as possible with your second (or third shot) to the edge of a precipitous drop down to a large water hazard, leaving a short iron approach to the green from this elevated position. On the other side of the hazard was the two-tier 18th green. The pin on the final day was on the back top tier.

At the prizegiving, we were approached by United States team member Jeb Stuart (a screenwriter for the Die Hard movies and 6-handicap golfer), asking about reciprocal events with the SA Senior Golfers Society. Jeb is a member of the US Seniors Golf Association (founded 1905), and as chairman of their special events committee has been charged with expanding international play among their membership. Their participation in the King Leopold Challenge was their maiden voyage.

They are now keen on a trip to South Africa and hosting our seniors in America. Our committee have since been in contact with them.

by Francis Verheughe and Louis Davisard from the Belgium 4 team, which increased their overall lead to seven points over the Canadians, having had 74 and 76. There was a 40 by a Luxembourg pairing. Horak and McLean had 38 (great putt to save par on the 18th, Dave) and Aitken and Allen 36, putting them among the 10 leading scores on the day.

The South African A team were nine points off the leaders in the net, and 29 points ahead of the B team. The now traditional 10-10-10-20 wager between the two teams was looking to go the other way to Waterloo.

## DAY 4 SINGLES

Spiegelven comes across as a bossy golf club, possibly because it has to deal with many casual social golfers. A sign on the first tee told us exactly what we could and couldn't do on the course. No plastic tees, only one practice swing, fix divots, pitchmarks, etc.

The B team were among the early starters on the Thursday, but failed to make any headway up the leaderboard, and had to settle for a share of the wooden

spoon with Germany 3 and Belgium 3.

The A team were not among the top three leaders (Belgium 4, Canada, Germany 1), who were paired last off together, and went ahead of them, paired with Belgium 1 and Netherlands 2. McLean led the way, and found good form on another superb weather day, posting 39 points off his 7 handicap, the day's best score. He was out in two-over 38 with a birdie at the fifth, and back in two-over 38 with no further birdies.

Horak followed him in with an excellent 34 points off 13, then Morris came in with 27, giving the A team a total of 100 points from the three best scores out of four. That elevated the team into second place ahead of Germany 1 and Belgium 4. The Canadians matched our 100-point total with scores of 35-33-32, and won by two.

McLean won the Best Gross prize with 32 points (76), by one point from Brian Davies, a friendly two-handicap from Remedy Oaks GC in the south of England. He also has a home at Arabella. Third on 30 points was Belgium's Bernard Donck. They were the only players to break 80.

The par-5 18th at Spiegelven was a

## OVERALL SCORES

### DAY 1 (GREENSOMES)

Belgium 4 did best with 74 points, with Canada 1 and Germany 1 on 73. The SA 1 team were five back on 69. The SA 2 team began with 53.

### DAY 2 (BETTERBALL)

Belgium 4 had another good day with 76 points and a total of 150, to lead Canada 1 (70) by seven shots, with SA 1 (72) tied third on 141 with Germany 1 (68). SA 2 had 59 to be on 112.

### DAY 3 (SINGLES)

Belgium 4 imploded with 71 points (three scores to count), allowing Canada to win the net title by two points from SA 1 after both had scored 100 points. Canada also won the gross event which they had led from the first day.

## INDIVIDUAL SA SCORES

Stuart McLean	40-38-39=117
Dave Horak	40-38-34=112
Stuart Morris	29-34-27=90
Doug Aitken	28-36-20=84
Pete Bailey	29-34-20=83
Chris Allen	28-36-18=82
Howard Garmany	25-23-27=75
Pete Lloyd	25-23-18=66

Enjoying the final night dinner at La Botte in Genk.



## THE AFTERMATH

A booking had been made on the final night for an Italian restaurant in Genk which had a good reputation and was recommended. With everyone in good spirits, we settled in around a large table. La Botte had a celebrity Sicilian chef in Peppe Giacomazza, whose father Vincenzo had created the business and won awards.

We were hoping to meet the great Peppe himself during the evening, as the other diners were all telling us about his amazing culinary skills, but he never did appear from the kitchen, if he had ever been there in the first place. He does have another restaurant in town.

We opted as a group for the seven-course “Tasting Menu” (Dégustation) and enjoyed a long gastronomic evening of good food, a variety of different tastes, lots of red and white wine, and much laughter. The hours went by as we sampled small portions of Peppe’s signature dishes. The bill for 10 people was enormous (the Allens

were missing, Anne not feeling well), in the region of R15 000, about 100 euros a head, but we were all in such a happy mood that we felt it was well worth it, a grand finish to another memorable week in Belgium.

### Final classement Net

1	Canada 1	(73-70-100)	243
2	South Africa 1	(69-72-100)	241
3	Belgium 1	(67-67-103)	237
4	Germany 1	(73-68-95)	236
5	Luxembourg 2	(60-70-94)	224
6	France 1	(69-71-84)	224
7	Belgium 5	(66-63-92)	221
8	Belgium 4	(74-76-71)	221
9	Great Britain 1	(63-67-90)	220
10	Netherlands 1	(68-69-83)	220

Note: SA 2 were T-23 on 177

### Final classement Gross

1	Canada 1	(57-58-82)	197
2	Belgium 1	(53-55-79)	187
3	Germany 1	(55-52-69)	176
4	France 1	(53-58-62)	173
5	Great Britain 1	(48-53-71)	172
6	South Africa 1	(49-52-69)	170