

SCHULTHESS KLINIK

André Bossert
Know who's boss

By Marion Widmer

"In South Africa, sportspeople only have to fulfil their military duties in the mornings. In the afternoons, they are allowed to train. Every time there was a tournament, they had to release me. Funnily enough, that's when I became a professional golfer."

He is the only professional Swiss golf player to have qualified for the Open Championship and to have won a tournament on the Professional Golf Association European (PGA) Tour. Despite a severe injury in 1997, South African-born André Bossert – aka 'Bossy' – has never ceased to pursue his dream of becoming the world's best golfer.

South African heritage

It seems to be a rule that – away from the slopes – Switzerland's highest-flying sportsmen have South African roots. Roger Federer and Thabo Sefolosha (Switzerland's only National Basketball Association player) each have one South African parent. André Bossert, Switzerland's most successful golf professional, also has a close affiliation with the 'Rainbow Nation'.

Born and raised in South Africa, Bossert describes the story of his swiss parents emigrating there in the 1950s as "funny". He recalls, "My parents used to work in a hotel in Egypt. When President Farouk was dismissed in 1953, they hopped on the next boat and happened to land in South Africa." In Johannesburg, they started their own successful catering service. And it was not long before they became fans of golf – a popular sport in South Africa.

That is why little André Bossert, born in 1963, came into close contact with the sport early on. By the age of 15, he had entirely devoted himself to golf. Up until then, Bossert had been a keen sportsman, playing tennis, football, cricket and rugby. "At some point, I was too lazy to keep running around. That's why I decided to stick only to golf," the 49-year-old admits with a laugh.

Unusual beginnings

From then on, the ambitious Bossert was to be found on the course regularly. He had only one aim: to become the world's best golfer. Low and behold, it only took a few years – and a rather bizarre twist – until his career got going. "I received a letter from Switzerland asking me to join the military. However, the South African government reminded me that I wouldn't be allowed to enter South Africa again should I accept the Swiss 'offer'." Faced with the choice, Bossert decided to sign up for two-year military service in South Africa.

"Funnily enough, that's when I became a professional golfer," he explains. "In South Africa, sportspeople only have to fulfil

their military duties in the mornings. In the afternoons, they are allowed to train. Every time there was a tournament, they had to release me." The cunning Bossert signed up for as many tournaments as possible, quickly becoming one of the top four amateur golfers in South Africa.

Soon the news of his success reached the other side of the Atlantic and the keen golfer was granted a scholarship at the University of Tulsa in the United States of America. His grant enabled him to remain focused on his goal of becoming a professional golfer as well as acquiring a business degree. "The years at university were some of the best of my life," Bossert remembers with enthusiasm.

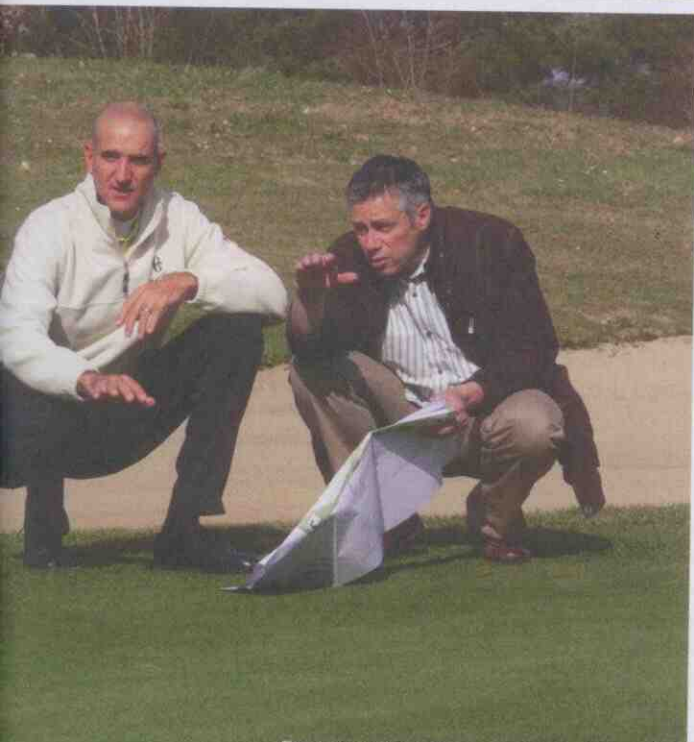
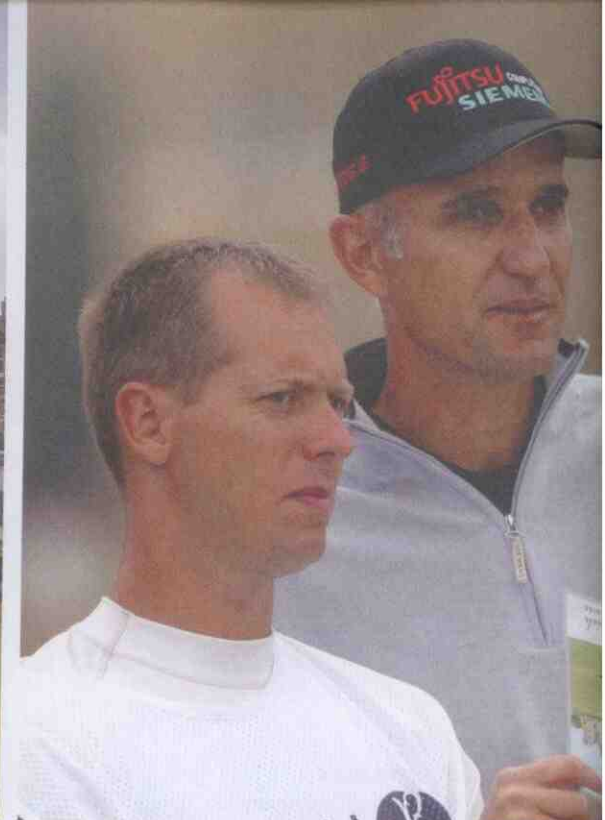
Journey to success

Switzerland may not be renowned for its rich affiliation with golf, but it was moving here that helped Bossert take the next big step in pursuing a professional golf career. However, after growing up and living in countries with such a golfing history, why did the talented golfer ever leave? "A good question," he muses. "My half-sister Henriette asked me to join her in Switzerland during a summer break and signed me up for some local amateur golf tournaments. Although I thought it was a crazy idea, I decided to give it a go, as I have always been close to my half-sister."

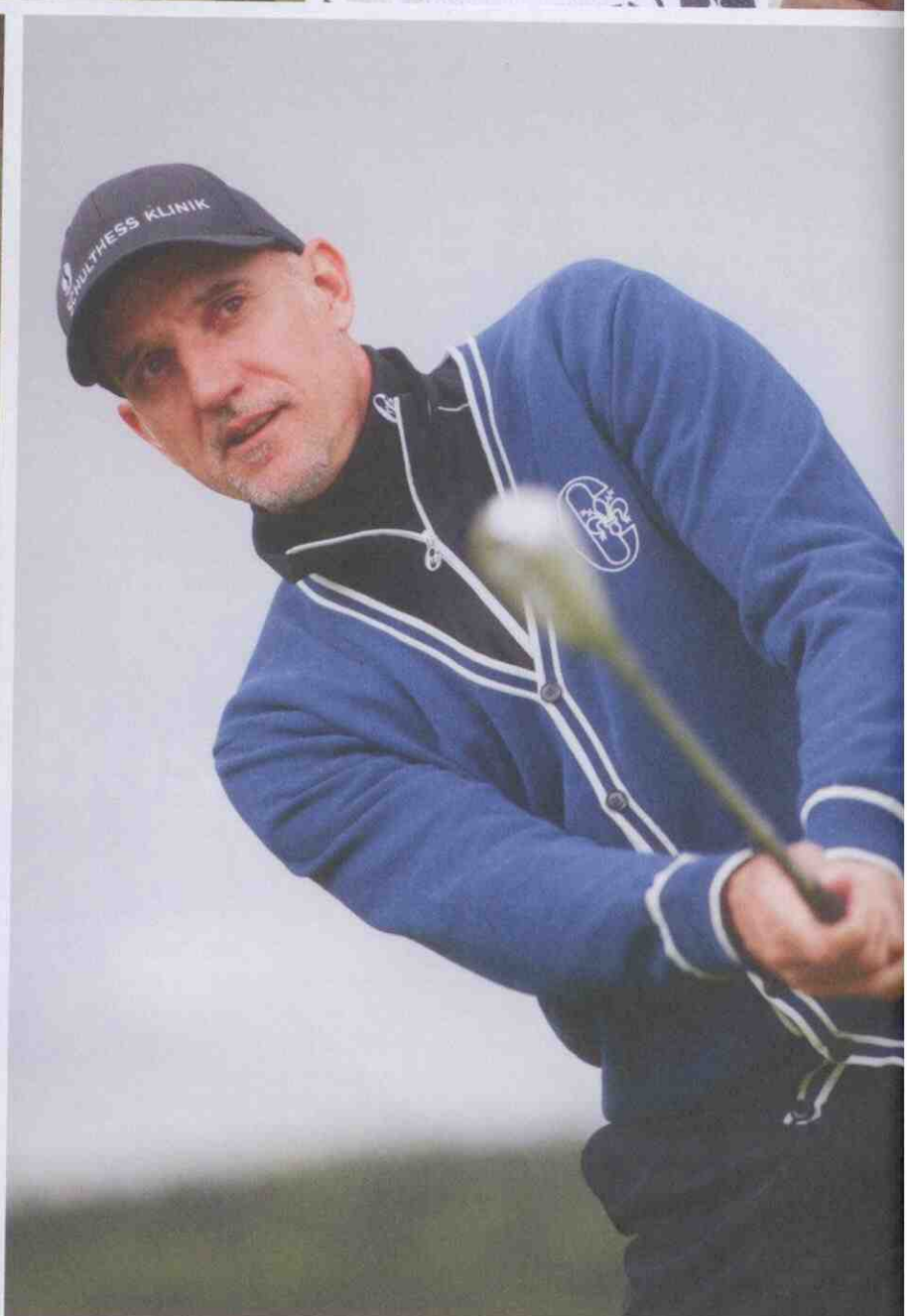
After winning all five of the tournaments that he entered, Bossert was asked to play for Switzerland in the World Amateur Championships. "I decided to come back one year later, after finishing my Bachelor's Degree in Business, to try and qualify for the European Tour, [an] elite golf tour," he adds. He reached his goal in 1992 and after that success seamlessly followed success. In 1994, Bossert qualified for The Open Championship in Turnberry and, in 1995, he won the Air France Cannes Open. To date, he remains the first and only Swiss professional golfer to have won a competition on the European Tour.

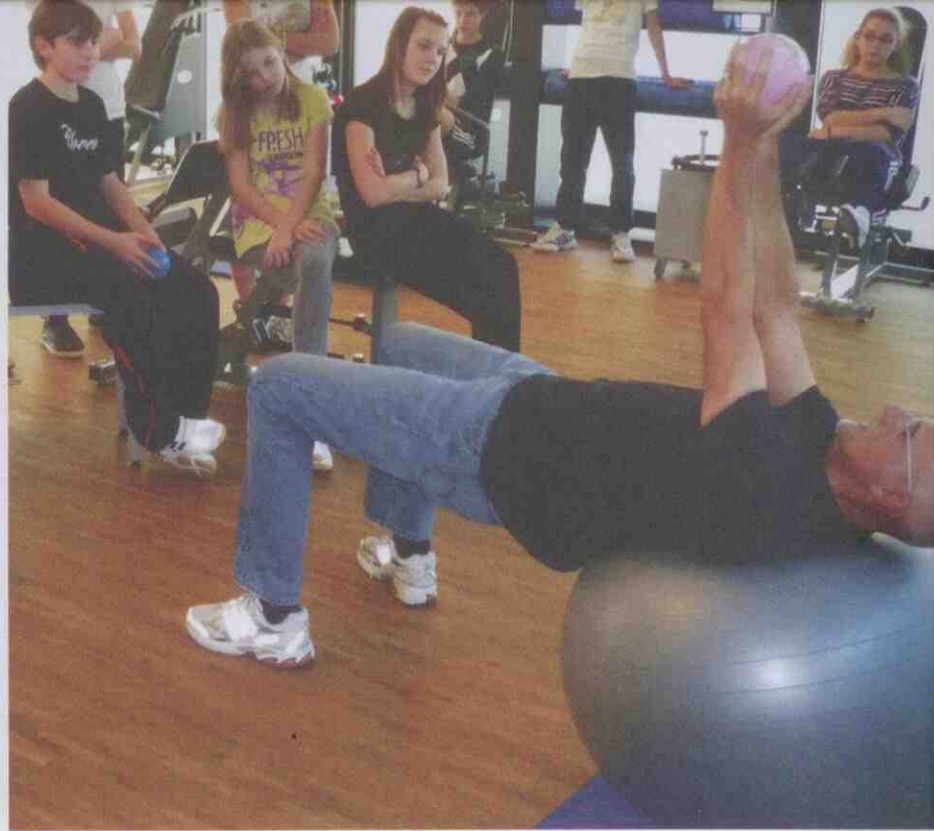
Bouncing back

Unfortunately, Bossert's promising career literally got a 'crack' in it when he was hindered by serious back problems in 1997. "I was in limbo for two and a half years," he recalls of the most difficult time in his life. When he reached the low point of not being able to sit up straight for more than 15 minutes, he eventually decided to have surgery. "Thanks to my determination and my fantastic wife, Bettina, who was



Bossert with landscape architect Dardelet





my biggest supporter, I fought my way back. It was hard work, but I was always convinced I would succeed."

Bossert's impressive comeback came in 2000, when he won the Swiss Professional Golf Association Championship. Since then, he has won the 2002 Davidoff Nations Cup and the 2007 Swiss Omnium, qualified again for the Open Championship in St. Andrews, and represented Switzerland several times at the World Cup of Golf. In July 2008, he won the Man Niederösterreich Open in Austria on the Challenge Tour.

Although Bossert's back problems prevented him from winning further titles on the European Tour, he sees the 'positive' side of his injury in a typical South African manner: "Back in the day, hardly anything was known about golf and fitness or how to improve one's technique. Since my injury, I have gained in-depth knowledge about these topics and my technique and fitness [level] have improved considerably."

During the long and intense time he spent at *Schulthess Klinik* in Zurich, one of Europe's leading orthopaedic clinics, Bossert met many doctors. The bonds created led to the foundation of the Golf Medical Center, the only medical centre in Switzerland specifically aimed at the health and fitness of golfers. Here, golfers can profit from a thorough medical check-up. This includes the analysis of their swing and tips for their play by Bossert and specialised physiotherapists.

Pro-active thinking

The forced break was anything but unproductive. The time enabled him to re-discover his passion for golf course design. "I have always been interested in design and architecture and started designing golf courses when I was a teenager," he says. "I used to talk to golf professionals to ask for their advice.

While I was injured, I started to engross myself in golf course design again."

This rekindled passion led to a creative partnership with Swiss golf architect Jean Dardelet. In creating new golf courses and redesigning existing ones, the duo benefits from the joint expertise they have accumulated since starting their respective professional careers in 1989. Bossert's strategic knowledge of golf courses is an added bonus. The pair have recently planned projects in Meilen, Canton Zurich, as well as in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic.

Bossert's passion for golf design does not stop there. He has been involved in several other projects. A highlight was working with Kurt Rossknecht, who designed the golf course at Andermatt Swiss Alps.

Workshops for companies and keen private golfers of any handicap complete his varied schedule. Illustrious fellow sportsmen Roger Federer and motorcycle road racer Tom Lüthi are among the golf fans who have benefited from Bossert's teaching. "Once Roger Federer participated in a golf exhibition hosted by one of his sponsors. During the golf show, I had the pleasure of giving him and Tom Lüthi tips on improving their performance on the green," Bossert reveals.

Bossert and Federer not only have their South African heritage with its great sense of humour in common – they also share the Swiss traits of precision and determination in working towards their goals. In 2014, Bossert will compete in the European Senior Tour for golfers aged 50 plus – his next big aim. Therefore, it would not come as a surprise if Bossert followed in Federer's footsteps by winning 17 majors on the Senior Tour, finally fulfilling his dream to become the world's best senior professional golf player.

Who is André Bossert?

Born: 14 November 1963
Johannesburg
Height: 1,90 metres
Career Highlights:
1989: Turned professional
1992: Winner of the Keny Open, Challenge Tour
1995: Winner of the Air France Cannes Open, European Tour
1994: Participant at The Open Championship, Turnberry
2000: Winner of the Swiss PGA Championship
2005: Participant at the Open Championship, St. Andrews
2008: Winner of the Man Niederösterreich Open, Challenge Tour
Next aim: European Senior Tour
Other projects:
Golf course design with J Dardelet
"Bossy Workshops" for golfers of any level
Adviser at the Golf Medical Center at Schulthess Klinik Zurich

www.andre-bossert.ch