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Golf-Dubai course builder Norman upbeat despite recession

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Buzz up!
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By Norman Dabell

DUBAI, Nov 18 (Reuters) - The global recession has taken its toll on this week's Dubai World Championship being staged at Greg Norman's 'Earth' course on the Jumeirah Golf Estates.

The impact of the economic downturn has resulted in a drop of 25 per cent in the \$20 million tournament and bonus pool prize fund, with each purse now worth a reduced \$7.5 million.

But the fall-out from the recession is more visible on the huge estate of uninhabited, largely incomplete, homes around the course as it stages the glittering finale of the European Tour's Race to Dubai (order of merit) in a mainly desert landscape.

However, Australia's former European order of merit winner and twice British Open champion Norman, builder of 14 courses worldwide, was unfazed by the scenario on Wednesday, calling for optimism over the prospects for a recovery in Dubai.

"A lot of wealth has been lost, as we all know, but don't focus on the fact there are a lot of empty buildings here, focus on (Dubai's) foresight and vision and believe this will be where it should be. It will take time but it will come back," he said.

"It's had to go through a bit of a transition time, readjustment, but Dubai will survive," added the 54-year-old. "We've seen golf courses put into moth balls but a lot of projects parked up around the world are coming back on line."

European Tour chief executive George O'Grady said there was no question Norman's course would host next year's tour finale.

"I read some of the gloom and doom in the newspapers which could make people think twice, but I'm extremely confident we will be back here next year," he said.

Despite the financial climate tons of white sand has been shipped from North Carolina for the Earth course bunkers because the local desert variety does not granulate well enough.

The tour has a five-year contract for the Race to Dubai and Dubai World Championship, which began this year.

(Editing by Ken Ferris; To query or comment on this story email sportsfeedback@thomsonreuters.com)

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