

AUSSIE GOLFERS BY THE NUMBERS

By Karen Harding

If winners are grinners, then Australia's professional golfers should have smiles from ear to ear as we near the end of 2010. Aussies have lifted the trophy on all bar one major international tour in a year characterised by resurgence and emergence.

For most, the stand out highlight was Stuart Appleby's win at the Greenbriar Classic. His final round not only earned him a new nickname – Mr 59 – but was arguably the most important of his career. His first win in four years yields a two-year exempt status on the PGA tour after a lean period forced him to use a one-off career earnings exemption to play in 2010. Appleby is only the fifth golfer and the first non-American to break 60 on the world's most competitive tour.

Appleby was the fourth Australian to win in the US this year, following Geoff Ogilvy's opening week victory in the SBS Championship in Hawaii, Adam Scott's Texas Open and Jason Day's breakthrough win at the Byron Nelson Classic.

Day's performance in only his second year as a professional was all the more impressive given his health problems throughout - which have caused him to withdraw from the Australian Masters and possibly the entire Australasian season - but he has earned exemption into the 2011 US Masters and bragging rights as the youngest Australian to win on the PGA Tour.

Though without a win, Robert Allenby (17) is leading Australian on the money list followed by Day (21) and Scott (28).

On the Nationwide Tour, three Australians - Ewan Porter, Steven Bowditch and Scott Gardiner - have been victorious, with Bowditch (13) and Gardiner (22) currently both within the top 25 who will graduate to the PGA Tour for 2011. With one week remaining, Won Joon Lee (33) and Alistair Presnell (35) still have a chance to earn their cards.

In Europe, Andrew Dodt (Avantha Masters) and Marcus Fraser (Ballantine's Championship) were winners in events co-sanctioned with the Asian Tour

while Richard Green took out the Portugal Masters, three years and 99 days after his second European Tour win and some 13 years after his first. In doing so, he also became the oldest winner of the event, and he and Phil Mickelson are the only two left-handers to win in the same season in European Tour history.

Green (21) is now Australia's top ranked player in Europe, followed by Brett Rumford (32) and Fraser (47).

On the Challenge Tour, Europe's version of the Nationwide, Daniel Gaunt flew the flag for Australia at the English Challenge and is the leading Australian.

On the Asian Development Tour, Gavin Flint opened the year with a win at the Air Bagan Myanmar Masters while on OneAsia, Kim Felton took out the Midea China Classic. Felton is another to be resurrecting his career, the title his first win since 2007, after a difficult period with much time away from competitive golf.

In Japan, Brendan Jones took out the Asia-Pacific Panasonic Open and is currently ninth on the money list.

On the women's side, Katherine Hull came from behind to win the Navistar LPGA Classic, two years after her first LPGA title. At 12th on the money list, Hull is our leading player with Karrie Webb (16) next best.

Though without a win this year in Japan, the only major tour on which we have not claimed a title in 2010, the consistent Nikki Campbell continues to be top Aussie there, currently 11th on the money list.

On the Ladies European Tour, Karen Lunn ended a 13-year victory drought at the Portugal Ladies Open, both she and Green making Portugal the place to be for a significant comeback win. Lunn (19) just shades Kristie Smith (23) on the Henderson money list.

Up-and-comer Smith scored her maiden US victory on the Duramed Futures Tour when she holed a 20-foot eagle putt on the last hole to win the Daytona Beach Invitational and, at 24th on the money list, is our leading player on that tour. At 144 on the Rolex world rankings, she surely has a bullet beside her name.

And Karrie Webb's victory in March at the LET-ALPG co-sanctioned ANZ Masters – her seventh Masters title – has her placed first on the ALPG Order of Merit. Arguably Australia's greatest ever golfer, the 2010 season's twilight sees her as the only Australian player to top any ranking list on any tour in the world. Andrew Dodt (3) is the top Australian on the men's Australasian Order of Merit.

Since 2004, the number of male Australians in the top 100 on world rankings has consistently been in double digits. In 2010 we have ten plus Stuart Appleby at 101. There are four men in the top 50 – Allenby (22), Day (34), Ogilvy (36) and Scott (40).

There are also four women in the top 50 in the world – Webb (15), Hull (20), Campbell (43) and Lindsey Wright (48). With fewer women players than men and less opportunities in terms of tours, tournaments and sponsors, the performance of these four is exceptional.