

Local greensman off to fancy US club

SUTHENTIRA GOVENDER

KWAZULU-NATAL greensman Fortune Mdluli may not be able to swing a golf club, but he has been selected to maintain the golf courses at the Congressional Country Club in Maryland, US, one of golfing legend Tiger Woods's favourite playing fields.

The 89-year-old country club, which has two 18-hole golf courses, has hosted three US Opens and a PGA Championship.

Mdluli will be helping to prepare the courses for the AT&T National in June, a tournament hosted by the Tiger Woods Foundation.

The 24-year-old, who works as a trainee greenskeeper at Prince's Grant, on KwaZulu-Natal's North Coast, said although he was excited, he was nervous

about maintaining the two world-renowned golf courses — the Blue Course and the Gold Course — famous for their rolling terrain, tree-lined fairways and wide, challenging greens.

"I'm nervous and excited ... and it's going to be a challenge, but one I'm up for," he said.

For now, Mdluli admits, he is more nervous about the aeroplane trip to the US next Friday.

Mdluli's one-year internship at the Congressional Country Club was organised by the Future Farmers' Association, an agricultural apprenticeship project that selects ambitious young people from poor families who do not have the means to get a tertiary education.

The project is the brainchild of former Pietermaritzburg dairy farmer Judy Stuart, who closed

her lucrative dairy farm operation eight years ago to train aspiring black farmers for free.

Stuart, who secured funding for Mdluli's entire US adventure, also roped in Dave Hutchinson, the Congressional Country Club's head greenskeeper, to serve as his mentor. Hutchinson once maintained the Gary Player Golf Course at Sun City.

Mdluli's duties will include nurturing and mowing the turf and spraying the right amount of chemicals to maintain the courses' attractive greens.

Stuart said she was proud of Mdluli's success, having monitored his work and progress over the years.

"He has worked very hard and after four years of training he is ready for this overseas internship," she said.



READY TO ROLL: Intern Fortune Mdluli
Picture: THEMBINKOSI DWAYISA