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Media Release

Z Legends Tournament Marks 30 Years of Sporting Camaraderie at Cromwell

The Cromwell Golf Club will be at the centre of one of the most distinctive events on the New Zealand sporting calendar when the Z Legends Golf Tournament is staged for the 30th time on January 17 and 18, 2026.

What began in 1997 as an inspired idea to combine competitive golf with sporting fellowship has grown into a fixture that is now unique in New Zealand golf. The defining feature of the Z Legends Tournament is simple but compelling: every four-person team must include at least one current or former national or provincial sporting representative in any sport. That single requirement has ensured that, for three decades, the Cromwell fairways have hosted an extraordinary cross-section of New Zealand sporting history.

Over the years, the tournament has attracted some of the country's most recognisable sporting figures. Past participants have included the late Sir Brian Lochore and Sir Richard Hadlee, while more recent editions have featured All Blacks such as Damian McKenzie and Christian Cullen. The 30th staging will be no exception, with former All Blacks Ben Smith, Tony Brown and Jimmy Cowan confirmed among the field, alongside former Black Cap Mark Craig.

Adding further intrigue is the return of the defending champion team, led by Highlanders favourite Marty Banks, who will be attempting to go back-to-back in an event where repeat success is notoriously difficult.

The tournament was conceived by then Cromwell Golf Club manager Doug Harradine, himself a former Otago golf representative. Harradine's original vision was for a weekend where friends from different sporting backgrounds could reunite, enjoy each other's company and still test themselves on the course. That balance between social enjoyment and genuine competition remains at the heart of the Z Legends Tournament today.

The format reflects that philosophy. Saturday's opening round is a four-person Ambrose, with teams playing from the best ball on each shot, encouraging aggressive play and plenty of banter. Sunday brings a more exacting challenge, with a handicap medal round where the best three of four net scores on each hole count toward the team total. As many past competitors will attest, the second day is where "serious golf" begins.

Interest in the 30th Z Legends Tournament has been as strong as ever. Sixty-one teams, comprising 244 players, will take part, making it the Cromwell Golf Club's busiest weekend of the year. The scale of the event reflects both its reputation and the affection in which it is held by participants, many of whom return year after year.

Few embody that loyalty more than Harradine himself, who has played in every Z Legends Tournament since its inception and always with the same team: former New Zealand golf team member Kim McDonald, one-time Otago representative Bruce Marshall and long-time Cromwell member Evan Dickie. Their enduring partnership was rewarded in 2004 when they claimed the title, a victory still fondly recalled.

While the tournament boasts an impressive list of household names, the term “legend” is applied with a generous and inclusive spirit. Alongside former international and provincial stars are many competitors whose sporting achievements may be less widely known but no less valued. The field includes numerous age-group representatives from decades past, as well as some wonderfully eclectic credentials.

Among those lining up in 2026 are Skip Johnston of Tarras, the 1982 national steer roping champion, a New Zealand darts representative from 45 years ago Carol Stanford and Cromwell’s Dougal Weily, an Otago poker representative – proof that the definition of sporting excellence at the Legends Tournament is refreshingly broad.

As the Z Legends Golf Tournament celebrates its 30th playing, it stands as a testament to the enduring power of sport to connect people across generations and disciplines. For Cromwell, it is a weekend that combines high-quality golf, famous names, local characters and a sense of occasion that has been three decades in the making.

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