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## GOLF

# Top stars for Indian Open

Principal Correspondent

**GURGAON:** The Hero women's Indian Open is slowly gaining popularity among golfers. The presence of at least three top-10 Ladies European Tour (LET) Order of Merit players in the field speaks about the kind of competition one can expect in the fifth edition of the event to be held at the DLF Golf and Country Club here from December 9-11.

The \$300,000 annual event, co-sanctioned by the LET, Ladies Asian Golf Tour (LAGT) and the Women's Golf Association of India (WGAI), will have some of the best in the business — like rookie star Caroline Hedwall of Sweden, her compatriot Sophie Gustafson and South African Lee-Ann Pace from the LET.

Besides, defending champion Laura Davies and two-time winner Phatlum Pornanong of Thailand will resume their quest for the title.

"It is a good field," remarked Caroline, who has claimed three titles so far on her first year as a pro.

"The course looks nice," said the Swede following her brief

outing on the neatly-prepared DLF course for the 'skills challenge' on Tuesday.

US golfer Christian Kim, who has been in the profession for around a decade, was delighted on her first visit to India and expected a formidable challenge from her rivals.

### Simi Mehra returns

Seasoned Indian pro Simi Mehra, who had suffered a broken left ankle, returned to the competitive field in August last following a four-month lay-off.

Now, with some match practice on the domestic circuit, she considers herself "better prepared" for the event.

WGAI Order of Merit leader Sharmila Nicollet, after having changed her coach and swing and grabbing a domestic title last month, is raring to go.

Young Nalini Singh Siwach, second on the WGAI money list, feels more confident about her game in the run-up to her second appearance in the Indian Open.

Four top home pros, who make the cut in the event, will be sent to the LET Q-school in a joint effort by the Ministry of Tourism and WGAI.