

# Indians bank on home advantage

## WOMEN'S | GOLF

**PRIYANKA SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, NOV. 26

For Sharmila Nicollet, the 2013 season has come as a contrast to last year when she earned a card on the Ladies European Tour. A multiple-toe fracture in April had forced her out of action for four months, resulting in pull-outs from several LET events, along with a few domestic tournaments. She also lost her LET card besides suffering a dip in form and confidence.

But ahead of the \$300,000 Hero Women's Indian Open, that starts with the Pro-Am on Wednesday, a rejuvenated Sharmila feels she has a



**Sharmila Nicollet**

fair chance to be in contention at the challenging Delhi Golf Club this week. "I hardly had a season. I started off well, but the injury kept me away from action for four months. And it was tough. The injury is

almost healed now. I went to rehab, and have been working on my fitness, trying hard to get back my rhythm and shape. Physically, I feel stronger now," said Sharmila, who is planning to go for the LET qualifiers this year.

"I have played a lot here as an amateur. I will be out in the field with a strategy. I feel the Indians, including me, will have a fair chance in the event. I just need to put together three days of consistent golf," added the lanky Bengalurean golfer, who will lead the 20-strong Indian challenge in the field of 107.

Local girl Vani Kapoor, who has won a domestic pro tou event at the DGC in October, will also be one of the Indian contenders to watch out for

at the tri-sanctioned event.

Meanwhile, Order of Merit leader Neha Tripathi felt that Indians would have an edge at the event, considering the nature of the course.

"Overseas players are comfortable on longer courses, so we have a better chance, it's like a home course."

Sharmila however warned, "There is no room for an error at this course. You need to be very accurate off the tees in such a tight course. It will be a great challenge."

Home advantage notwithstanding, the Indian golfers should be ready for a strong challenge from LET stars Gwladys Nocera and Holly Clyburn among others.

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### घरेलू परिस्थितियों का फायदा उठाना चाहेंगी भारतीय गोल्फर

नई दिल्ली : अनुभवी शर्मिला निकोलेट की अगुआई में भारतीय गोल्फर बुधवार से शुरू हो रहे हीरो महिला इंडियन ओपन 2013 में घरेलू परिस्थितियों का फायदा उठाना चाहेंगी। दिल्ली गोल्फ कोर्स पर तीन दिन तक खेले जाने वाले इस टूर्नामेंट में निकोलेट का कहना है कि उनका इरादा यहां अच्छा प्रदर्शन कर शीर्ष दस में जगह बनाना है। वहीं दिल्ली की गोल्फर वाणी कपूर ने कहा कि घरेलू दर्शकों के सामने खेलने से निश्चित तौर पर हमें फायदा मिलेगा। ऑर्डर ऑफ मेरिट में शीर्ष पर चल रही नेहा त्रिपाठी ने कहा कि हर कोई हम से इंडियन ओपन में अच्छे प्रदर्शन की उम्मीद कर रहा है। उम्मीद है कि हम घरेलू मैदान पर अच्छा प्रदर्शन करेंगे।

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## Rest of the World wins Skills Challenge

**NEW DELHI:** Round One of the seventh women's Indian Open golf may have gone to the visitor, but local hopes are far from worried about their performances.

The Skills Challenge, a pre-contest event that tests the golfers on individual skills through the 18-hole course, was won by the Rest of the World team at the Delhi Golf Course on Tuesday. The event is being held at the picturesque venue for the first time.

"Playing here will definitely be an advantage for the Indians, but at the same time it will not be a cakewalk. There are some really good players here and it will be a very challenging three days for anyone to be in contention for the top spot," said Vani Kapoor, currently second on the Indian Order of Merit and one of the top Indian draws at the event.

The event will tee off on Thursday.

**The results: Skills Challenge:**  
**Long drive (10th tee):** Sophie Gustafson (Swe) 283 yards; **100-yard pitch (18th fairway):** Sharmila Nicollet (Ind), 3 feet 5 inches from hole; **Bunker shot (18th greenside):** Maria Bakikoeva (Rus), 1 feet 6 inches from hole; **Long putt (18th green):** Sophie, 9 inches from hole. — Special Correspondent

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## Home advantage for Indian golfers

HT Correspondent

• [sportdesk@hindustantimes.com](mailto:sportdesk@hindustantimes.com)

**NEW DELHI:** Home advantage is always of help. And that's exactly what Indians playing in the seventh edition of the Hero Women's Indian Open will be hoping for.

Being held at the Delhi Golf Club for the first time from Thursday-Saturday, the \$30,000 (₹20 lakh) tri-sanctioned event by the Ladies European Tour, Ladies Asian Golf Tour and Womens' Golf Association of India), will have the likes of Sharmila Nicollet, Vani Kapoor and Neha Tripathi hoping for a top-10 finish.

"You are playing in India. You've played on this course before so that will be an advantage, definitely," says Nicollet, India's sole golfer playing on the LET. Thanks to an injury, this season has been rather topsy-turvy for the youngster and she is aiming to secure her card for next season.



Indian golfers (from left) Neha Tripathi, Vani Kapoor and Sharmila Nicollet with the Hero Women's Indian Open trophy in the Capital on Tuesday.

# Indians seeking home advantage

By **Shaghil Bilali** in New Delhi

HERO Women's Indian Open golf tournament, India's biggest and the only Ladies European Tour (LET) event, starting Thursday, will see a change of venue for the first time in its seven-year history.

The treacherous Delhi Golf Club (DGC) will be the new venue, and not the traditional DLF Golf and Country Club in Gurgaon.

It will also be a change from an open to a narrow course, and the leading Indian golfers feel the local players would have an edge at the new venue since their game is suited more to the DGC.

Sharmila Nicollet, the only Indian to have a card on the LET, says the crowd support and the nature of course would add to the local players' advantage.

"The DGC has tree-lined narrow fairways. Here, it's accuracy and not the power that is necessary to shoot low scores. Since local players know this course better than their foreign counterparts, they can shoot some really low scores," she said.

"We will have support of local fans

and that will also boost us to perform better. I am recovering from the injury but my game is improving. My target is to play three consistent rounds and finish in top-10," said Sharmila, who is recovering from a toe injury.

On the other hand, Neha Tripathi, India's No.1 golfer on the domestic tour, is set to appear in her fourth Indian Open. She has won five events this season, including one at the DGC. She said playing alongside top European players would be a learning experience for her.

"Playing in a field that has top LET players will add a bit pressure on us, but we can

## Women golfers want to cash in on knowledge of Delhi Golf Club

learn a lot of things from them, like the way they carry themselves on the course and their approach to the game," she outlined. "I have played a lot on this course and won an event here. I have had a pretty good season and want to carry forward the form into the Indian Open."

In-form Vani Kapoor, winner of the two events last month, wants to cash in on her knowledge of the course. "The DGC is like my home course. I know the

nuances of the course and want to exploit the conditions to the best of my knowledge. The course is playing well and it should be a low-scoring tournament," she said.

**Sharmila Nicollet eyes a top-10 finish at the Women's Indian Open tournament**

## Indians hope to do well in women's Indian Open Golf



(From left) Neha Tripathi, Vani Kapoor and Sharmila Nicollet unveil women's Indian Open Golf trophy, in New Delhi on Tuesday. = SNS

### STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, 26 November

Indian women golfers today exuded confidence of performing well in the in the \$300,000 Hero Women's Indian Open which starts with the Pro-Am at the Delhi Golf Club here from tomorrow.

Around 20 Indian golfers will be taking part in the event, which is sanctioned by the Ladies European Tour (LET), Ladies Asian Golf Tour (LAGT) and the Womens Golf Association of India (WGAI).

Spearheaded by seasoned campaigner Sharmila Nicollet, the Indians hope to capitalise on the home advantage in the star studded field when they prepare to mount a strong challenge in the three-day main tournament from 28 to 30 November.

Talking to media persons here Nicollet was candid enough to admit that playing at the DGC would certainly be an advantage for the Indians.

"Playing here will definitely be an advantage. It is going to give an edge. Though, there is a lot of buzz and expectations," she said, adding "I am aiming for a top 10 finish."

Nicollet however admitted that she was not fully recovered from the injury she suffered in April.

"Unfortunately, I was injured and was advised to rest for a couple of months. I am working on my fitness and undergoing rehab. I am not 100 per cent fit but I hope to do well here. My aim is to be injury free and pain free. I have been working on my fitness and have improved on my short game. I am feeling confident and hopefully, I can secure a

card for next year," she said.

Order of Merit leader Neha Tripathi, also sounded confident of good showing. "Everyone's expecting a lot from us so that could add to the pressure. Since I have done well here, I am pretty confident. It will be a good learning experience playing along side some of the top golfers," said Neha.

### INTERNATIONALS OVERWHELM TEAM ASIA

'Rest of the World' team beat 'Asia' 3-1 in the 'Hero Skills Challenge' at the par-72, Delhi Golf Club (DGC) course here today.

The Rest of the World team comprising Sophie Gustafson (Sweden), Gwladys Nocera (France), Holly Clyburn (England) and Maria Balikoeva (Russia) beat The Asian team of Sharmila Nicollet, Neha Tripathi, Vani Kapoor (India) and Chung Ye Na (Korea) 3-1. The winners earned Rs 90,000 for their efforts while Team Asia received Rs 30,000. Each skills contest was worth a prize purse of Rs 30,000.

The Hero Skills Challenge' teed-off with the Longest Drive' competition. Rest-of the World beat Asia in this format after Ladies European Tour star Sophie Gustafson let loose a 233-yard drive on the tenth fairway. Asia's best reply in this contest came in the form of a 265-yard effort by Sharmila Nicollet.

Sharmila however pulled one back for team Asia in the 'Closest to the Pin' contest with her ball coming to rest 3.5 feet from the pin. The best the Rest of the World could manage in this category was a 12 feet 6 inch effort from Holly Clyburn of England.

# Euro stars shine in skills challenge

Rohan Puri | TNN

**New Delhi:** Even as the golfers prepare for the Hero Women's Indian Open which begins on Thursday they took part in an engaging skills challenge in which Rest of the World beat Team Asia 3-1 at the Delhi Golf Club on Tuesday.

Rest of the World, comprising Gwladys Nocera (France), Holly Clyburn (England), Sophie Gustafson (Sweden) and Maria Balikoeva (Russia), upstaged Team Asia comprising Sharmila Nicolle, Vani Kapoor, Neha Tripathi (all India) and Chung Ye Na (Korea) easily. The

## WOMEN'S INDIAN OPEN

players competed in four skills: longest drive, closest to the pin, bunker shot and putting contest.

The Indian Open commences with the Pro-Am on Wednesday, followed by the three-day main strokeplay tournament. The event is being held at DGC for the first time and will see 107 golfers from more than 30 countries battle it out in the \$300,000 tourney.

"I am feeling confident and hope to put in three good rounds. My game has improved a lot and am paying more attention to my fitness," said Sharmila Nicolle, who is the youngest Indian to have qualified for the Ladies European Tour (LET). Current Indian Order of Merit leader Neha Tripathi said she was confident of putting up a good show.



**TOP SHOT:** Gwladys Nocera will be one of the favourites for the Indian Open title

"My game has improved a lot and it has been a really good season for me." When asked what she thought was the most challenging part of the course, she said, "Keeping the ball on the fairway."

All eyes will be on Nocera who has been in good form and is coming off a triumphant run in the China Suzhou Taihu Open earlier this month. "This year has gone well for me. I will do my best but you never know what will happen on the course," she told TOI. The 38-year old is currently placed fourth in the Order of Merit for 2013 with total earnings of euro 210,894.38 from 20 appearances.

Clyburn, another marquee name, said she was excited to be part of the Indian Open. She is currently placed eighth in the Order of Merit.

The Indian contingent is, meanwhile, hoping that playing in front of the home crowd would work in their favour: "We do have an advantage," said Sharmila. "Yes, we do have an edge but it can also put a bit of pressure on us," added Vani.

The Indian Open is tri-sanctioned by the Ladies European Tour, the Ladies Asian Golf Tour and Women's Golf Association of India.



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