

Ladies set for DGC challenge

Ritu Sejwal | TNN

New Delhi: A narrow fairway and a faster course at the Delhi Golf Club will throw some tricky challenges when the seventh edition of the \$300,000 Hero Women's Indian Open tees off on Thursday.

an challenge. Sharmila Nicolle and Vani Kapoor are also expected to put up a strong challenge.

Nocera, who is fourth on the Ladies European Tour Order of Merit after winning in Slovakia and China, felt that her accuracy with the driver

confidence is back. It's a three-round event so you have to start strong, get off to a fast start so you don't waste time."

Meanwhile, England's Liz Young, who is yet to win a major title this year, made a heady start by leading her team to a fine win in the Pro-Am.

Neha is hoping to finish the year on a high. "It's been a great season. I've had good scores through the season. My game has improved. I have worked on my fitness level and playing much more consistent than before," Neha said.

The 108-strong field, including 45 LET members, will tee up in the 54-hole strokeplay event. The cut will be applied to the leading 60 pros and those tied after two rounds.

Over to the ladies, then.

GOLF: WOMEN'S INDIAN OPEN

The three-day event, being held at the historic course for the first time, will have a host of international stars like France's Gwladys Nocera, Sweden's Sophie Gustafson, England's Holly Clyburn and Russia's Maria Balikoeva vying with home challengers.

Neha Tripathi, who won a tournament at the DGC in October, will spearhead the Indi-

should stand her in good stead. "I just played the front nine. The course is narrow and tricky so basically you have to do everything right. My accuracy with the driver is good so it's not a problem. It's more about distance control and strategy to avoid the hazards," Nocera, who warmed up with the Pro-Am on Wednesday, said. "I'm playing good and my

Sharmila, Simi lead hosts' charge

PRIYANKA SHARMA
NEW DELHI, NOV. 27

Even as the overseas players were making the most of their early arrival in India — adjusting to the course and conditions — home golfers were busy fancying their chances against higher-ranked opponents ahead of the \$300,000 Hero Women's Indian Open, which tees off at the Delhi Golf Course on Thursday.

India's women golfers, led by the seasoned Sharmila Nicolett and veteran Simi Mehra, are banking on their knowledge of DGC — the home course for most of them — and their style of game, to excel this week.

The 54-hole strokeplay event, tri-sanctioned by the Ladies European Tour, Ladies Asian Golf Tour and the Women's Golf Association of India, has been for the first time moved out of the DLF Golf and Country Club to a new venue.

Order of Merit leader Neha Tripathi, local star Vani Kapoor, Ankita Tiwana besides amateurs Aditi Ashok, Gauri Monga and Gurbani



Singh will be the other home players in the field of 107, that has 19 Indians (12+7 amateurs) and 45 LET players.

Vani, who has won twice on the domestic tour, was confident of putting up a good show.

"DGC suits my game, which demands straight hitting and accuracy. I hope I will have an edge over others here, which is my home course.

"I think the LET players will be intimidated by the narrow fairways which have bushes on both sides. They are used

to playing on longer courses."

However she added: "The greens are faster than usual. I guess, it is done to suit the LET standards." Meanwhile, Aditi was happy to return to one of favourite courses, where she recorded her best score of four-under.

NOCERA LOOKS FOR 2007 REPLICA

LET star Gwladys Nocera will lead the overseas players including the English duo of Charley Hull and Holly Clyburn besides Swede

Sophie Gustafson and South Korea's Chung Ye Na among others.

Nocera, with two LET wins this season including the recent event in China, will start as one of the favourites in the stellar field. Having won the Emaar-MGF Ladies Masters, the country's first LET event in Bengaluru in 2007, the 38-year-old Frenchwoman will look to repeat the success this week.

Nocera has, in fact, chalked out strategy to tame the challenges at the DGC.

"My accuracy with the driver is good so it's not a problem of the fairway being narrow," said Nocera, adding that at DGC, "it's more about distance control".

Leading LET rookies Hull and Clyburn, on their first visit to India, were eyeing progress in the race to win the 2013 LET Rolex Rookie of the Year Award.

Past winners Phatlum Pormanong (2012), Caroline Hedwall (2011) besides top LET names like Lee-Ann Pace and Carlotta Ciganda, however, will be missing from the action this time.

Golf Women's Indian Open

Sharmila hopes to strike form

NEW DELHI: After their male counterparts, it is the turn of the women golfers to make an impact on their home turf when the \$300,000 Hero Indian Open 2013 tees off at the Delhi Golf Club (DGC) here on Thursday.

The three-day event, the only Ladies European Tour event in India in its seventh edition, is being held for the first time at DGC after holding the previous editions at DLF course in Gurgaon.

Sharmila Nicollet leads the home pack including a total of 19 golfers including seven amateurs. Vani Kapoor, Neha Tripathi and veteran Smriti Mehra are other notable Indian golfers. The event has a competitive field of 108 players comprising the likes of Gwladys Nocera of France, Holly Clyburn and LET rookie Charley Hull of England, Sophie Gustafson of Sweden and Chung Ye Na from South Korea.

Challenging the foreigners will be the tree-lined course, which demands accuracy, and gives the Indian golfers a bit of edge. Local girl Vani, the winner of the last two legs on the domestic tour, is confident about her chances in front of the home crowd. "The course is looking good, both the greens and fairways are in great shape. I am confident of doing well."

Sharmila, who is recovering

from a toe injury, is hopeful of a top-10 finish. "I have improved on my short game. I hoping for a top-10 finish and retaining my LET for next year," she said.

The ladies did not deny feeling the pressure of performing at home but preferred to take it as a learning process. Neha, who won this season's Order of Merit thanks to five victories including a tournament at the DGC, hoped to pick up some tips while rubbing shoulders alongside the top LET players.

"There will be a burden of expectations on Indian golfers, but the tournament will provide us a great opportunity to learn a lot of things from seasoned LET players," said Neha. "I have done well here so I am confident of my performance."

Sweden's Sophie Gustafson, a four-time winner of the LET Order of Merit with 26 tournament wins to her credit, is one of the longer hitters on tour with an average drive of 256 yards, but will not like to use her driver keeping in mind the nature of course. "I wouldn't have done it normally but there isn't one hole that I'd even consider taking driver," she said.

The players will tee up in the 54-hole stroke play event, with a cut to the leading 60 professionals and those tied after two rounds.

DH News Service

GOLF

Indians look to bank on home advantage

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The seventh edition of the Hero Women's Indian Open golf tournament will tee off at the Delhi Golf Club here on Thursday.

And one thing is certain – in the absence of any former winner of the tournament, the event will have a new winner this year.

The Indian challenge will be led by Sharmila Nicollet, the only Indian to play on the Ladies European Tour. Local hopefuls would be banking on home advantage to try and get the first Indian winner of the \$300,000 event, the biggest professional golf tournament for women in the country.

The three-day competition will see 107 golfers taking part including 19 Indians and tournament favourites like Gwladys Nocera of France, Holly Clyburn of England and Chung Ye Na of Korea. Three times winner and defending champion Phatlum Pornanong, currently playing on the LPGA tour, has



Sharmila Nicollet.

– FILE PHOTO

decided to skip the event.

"Playing here will definitely be an advantage though there is a lot of expectation. I am aiming for a top-10 finish," admitted Nicollet. The cut will be applied to the top 60 professionals and ties after Round 2.

A challenge

Vani Kapoor, who honed her

skills on the DGC and is second on the Hero Order of Merit 2013, said the cheering crowd will be an advantage but the course could not be taken lightly.

"The course is in good condition but it will be challenging. My main target is to make sure I keep the ball in play," she said.

Neha Tripathi, leading the Order of Merit, felt it would be tough for an Indian to win the tournament.

"I am confident of my game but so are many others. A lot of players are doing very well. Knowing the course helps but that will not make it any easier for an Indian to go for a win here," she said. The DGC is hosting the event for the first time.

Nicollet, who got injured in April this year, said there was no pain now but was not 100 per cent fit. The event is tri-sanctioned by the Ladies European Tour (LET), the Ladies Asian Golf Tour (LAGT) and the Women's Golf Association of India (WGAI).

Ladies gear up for DGC challenge

HT Correspondent

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NEW DELHI: New ground, new hope? When the Hero Women's Indian Open tees off at a new venue, the Indian challengers will be hoping that home advantage plays a crucial role. After all, it is a course that's dear to them.

With the likes of Gwladys Nocera of France, Holly Clyburn and Ladies European Tour (LET) rookie Charley Hull from England, Swede Sophie Gustafson and Chung Ye Na from South Korea taking part, the Indian golfers will have their task cut out at the Delhi Golf Club, which will be hosting the \$300,000 (around ₹ 1.86 crore) tri-sanctioned event.

Sharmila Nicollet, the sole

Indian golfer with a LET card, is hoping for the best. Thanks to a toe injury, the youngster has had a topsy-turvy season. "Playing at home should be an advantage because we know the course. However, there are a lot of expectations," said Sharmila, who is looking to secure her LET card for next season.

Another hopeful, Vani Kapoor, is confident. Having won the last two legs of the Hero Women's Professional Golf Tour, the local girl is eager to perform at home. "The greens and fairways are in great shape," said Vani. There are 19 Indian golfers in the field of 106. Korea's Chung is excited about playing in India. Having had the best finish of her career (third) at the Sanya Ladies Open in China a few weeks ago, she is hoping to continue from there.

Asians hold edge

Testing time for European Tour golfers at Women's Indian Open

By Shaghi Bilal in New Delhi

RISING stars Sharmila Nicollet, Neha Tripathi and Vani Kapoor will lead the local challenge while some of the finest visiting Asian players have a good opportunity to win the seventh Hero Women's Indian Open tournament starting here on Thursday.

The tree-lined narrow fairways of the Delhi Golf Club (DGC) are expected to test the golfers, including a depleted field from the Ladies European Tour (LET) in three-day 54-hole competition that carries a \$300,000 prize purse.

Besides the youngsters of the Women's Professional Golf Tour of India like Anikta Tiwana, veteran pro Smriti Mehra is part of the strong Indian field as the venue shifts from the DLF Golf and Country Club for the first time since 2007.

For top amateurs Aditi Ashok, who has so far been the best Indian finisher at the Indian Open,

at the eighth spot last year Gurbani Singh and Gauri Monge, it will be a big platform to showcase their talent. There will be a total of 19 golfers, including 12 pros and seven amateurs, from India.

The tournament has been more of a learning experience for Indians than winning the title, although Aditi created a stir last year. Even if two Indians finish among the top 10, it will be a big achievement for the country.

As far as the LET field is concerned, only three players among top 10 and five among top 20 are in the fray. Considering that world's top golfers don't play regularly on LET, it is a depleted field.

Frenchwoman Gwladys Nocera, winner of an LET event in China this month and No. 4 on order of merit, Sweden's Sophie Gustafson, a multiple winner on LET, rookie sensations Englishwomen Charley Hull, who has scored four runner-up finishes this season, and Holly Colburn, No. 6 and No. 8 on the order of merit

respectively, will spearhead the European challenge.

Since it is a joint-sanctioned event by LAT and LET and provides the continental golfers a huge opportunity to earn money and world rankings points, six of top seven players from LAT will be vying for the title.

South Korean Ye Na Chung, No. 2 on the order of merit on LAT, Patcharachuta Kongkapan, Titiya Pucksatoporn, Nontaya Srisawang and Rungethiwa Pangjan — all from Thailand — are in the fray.

The narrow fairways, surrounded by bushes and trees don't provide ideal conditions for LET regulars, who are used to playing on open and long fairways. It's not power — the forte of LET golfers — but accuracy — a strong point of the

Asians — that matters at the DGC. It is here when the Asian golfers come into the picture. Though a lot of Asians play on long courses these days, they are known more for their accuracy than power and that could help them turn the match into their favour this week. However, they can't be complacent against globe-trotter Europeans who have played across the world on different courses, and can topple the field on any given day.

"The fairways are fine but the greens are a bit faster which can give advantage to LET players. But at the DGC, it's more about accuracy. I think the advantage of playing on home course and knowing the nuances of it will add to the Indian's advantage," Neha said about the course conditions.



Sharmila Nicollet will lead the local field at the Hero Women's Indian Open starting at the Delhi Golf Club on Thursday.



Gwladys Nocera

Nepal enter World T20

NEPAL on Wednesday made history when they qualified for their maiden major ICC event by progressing to next year's World Twenty20 Championships after a five-wicket victory over Hong Kong in the qualifiers in Abu Dhabi.

Chasing 144 runs for victory, Nepal survived a last-over scare to score the required 13 runs, with 10 runs coming from the first two deliveries and a last-ball misfield producing the winning runs.

Also joining

Nepal in the event were the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which successfully defended a modest score of 118 runs to upset the Netherlands by 10 runs.

This will be the first time since 1996 World Cup that the UAE will make an appearance on the global stage.

A total of four sides have now sealed their places in the World Twenty20 after Afghanistan

and Ireland booked their berths on Monday.

UAE also qualify for 2014 event in Bangladesh

NICOLLET TO SPEARHEAD INDIAN CHALLENGE

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, 27 November

Sharmila Nicollet will spearhead 19-member Indian challenge - including seven amateurs - at the 7th edition of the Hero Women's Indian Open starting here from tomorrow

Vani Kapoor, Neha Tripathi, and Smriti Mehra are among the other leading Indians players who are in fray in the tournament, which carries a purse of \$300,000, the highest prize fund in the history of women's professional golf in the country.

The field of 108 competitors, including 45 LET members, will tee up in the 54-hole stroke play event, with a cut to the leading 60 professionals and those tied after two rounds.

The tournament will also see some of the top professionals of the world including Gwladys Nocera of France, Holly Clyburn and LET rookie Charley Hull from England, Sophie Gustafson of Sweden and Chung Ye Na from South Korea in action.

Sharmila, the youngest Indian to have qualified for the LET Tour and currently the lone Indian on the Tour, is recovering from a toe injury and is keen to make a mark at the DGC. The injury forced the golfer to take rest for three months. She has been working hard, is confident of doing well in her home country and hopeful of securing her LET card for next season.

Local girl Vani Kapoor is upbeat about her chances and confident of putting up a great show in front of the home crowd. She said, "The course is looking good,

both the greens and fairways are in great shape and I am confident of my chances here this week."

Neha Tripathi, who currently leads the domestic Hero Order of Merit, said playing alongside the top-flight LET players would be a great learning experience for her. "Home crowd support is definitely going to be advantageous for us. There will be a burden of expectations on Indian golfers, but the tournament will provide us a great opportunity to learn a lot of things from seasoned LET players."

Smriti Mehra, a former LPGA player is also aiming to finish up the leaderboard

Gwladys Nocera, the latest Ladies European Tour winner, Sophie Gustafson, Holly Clyburn, Charley Hull and Chung Ye Na are the star attraction in this event.

Sophie Gustafson said "I'm 99 per cent sure I'm going to take my driver out of my bag because I won't use it. I actually have two different three woods on me so I'm going to keep them both in the bag."

LIZ YOUNG WINS

Liz Young of England led her team to a fine win in the Pro-Am of the Hero Women's Indian Open here today. Young's team included Manish Periwal, Arjun Mahajan, and RS Sodhi.

Another English golfer, Felicity Johnson led her team comprising of Sidharth Shriram, Brijender Singh and Harinder Bansi to finish second. Neha Tripathi, who currently leads the Hero Order of Merit teamed up with Vikas Anand, Rahul Khanna and Shivam Khanna to finish third.