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## Hillier, MacLaren take joint lead at Indian Open golf

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**GURUGRAM:** But for the act of forgetfulness, Whitney Hillier could have been in sole lead at the Hero Women's Indian Open.

Viewing the pristine expanse from the 10th tee box of the DLF Golf and Country Club, the 28-year-old Australian, who finished on Thursday tied for the lead at five-under 67 with Briton Meghan MacLaren, liked what she saw.

With an early morning start, it was just MacLaren's group before hers, and with the greens still pure, Hillier looked forward to a positive start, possibly with a birdie. As she waited to tee-off with the slight breeze adding to the list she likes to tick at the beginning of a round, Hillier realised she had forgotten her water bottle, a "lucky mascot" even though she claims she isn't superstitious, in the washroom.

As plastic bottles are banned this week as part of the organisers' 'go-green' initiative, Hillier got anxious. With the temperature slated to go up, she feared dehydration as only paper cups are available by the water coolers at strategic points. There were flasks to be had, but Hillier was firm on getting her blue-green container back. "It isn't as if I'm particular, but the flask has travelled with me this season and to Sitges (Spain, where she got the year's first top-10 on the Ladies European Tour) last week and there was no way I was going to lose it," she said.

Time was short but Hillier ensured the bottle reached her through a helpful volunteer, but the anxiety distracted her to an extent that she pulled her first tee shot to the right. Working one's way out of trouble at this golf course is a task, and has drawn top pros to test their skill over the years. Hillier is here for that as well, coming after four years.

The bogey had a chastening effect, but not for long. "I told myself one error was enough for the day," she said and reeled off three consecutive birdies with some solid iron play, followed by three more on her back nine to renew the quest for a breakthrough win on the LET.

**Leaderboard:** 67: Meghan MacLaren; Whitney Hilliers; 68: Marianne Skarpnord; Liz Young; 69: Linda Wessberg; 70: Lina Boqvist; Emma Nilsson; Becky Kay; Catriona Matthew.