

Diksha leads country's hopes at Indian Open

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GURUGRAM: The last time an Indian won the Hero Women's Indian Open (HWIO) was back in 2016 when Aditi Ashok won by one stroke. The result, secured in Aditi's rookie season, sent her fledgling career into overdrive as she followed it up with Qatar Ladies Open title and finished the season second on the LET Order of Merit besides bagging the Rookie of the Year award.

Among the crowd that cheered Aditi to her title at DLF Golf and Country Club was Diksha Dagar, then a teenaged amateur. Almost a decade on, while Aditi has added more achievements to her glowing CV, Diksha has established herself as a Ladies European Tour (LET) regular and with two wins. Aditi, the India No.1 who plays on the LPGA Tour, will tee off in its

Shanghai event this week.

Diksha, 24, enters the tournament on the back of a solid season that has seen her collect seven top-10 finishes on the LET, including a solo second at Lalla Meryem Cup in Morocco at the start of the year. The in-form player, who has two wins on the LET, will hope to contend on a course that is playing much better than last year.

While the course staff has done a commendable job in keeping it in pristine condition despite an unusually long monsoon, the greens are slower and truer. On a course that invariably throws up challenges, consistency will be the key.

Diksha, 21st on the Order of Merit, agreed. "We have better control on the ball this time and rains have certainly helped us. Last year, the greens were too firm and the ball wouldn't stop. I think there will be good scoring opportunities this time," she said.

It is her home course and Diksha finished third just two years ago. "It's a course I know pretty well even though it presents a new challenge each time. I plan to take it one shot at a time. Even when you are doing well, on a course like this, it is important to stay calm and play the right shots," she added.

The other prominent Indian challengers are Avani Prashanth, Tvesa Malik, Hitaashee Bakshi, Pranavi Urs, Sneha Singh, Amandeep Drall and Vani Kapoor.

"I haven't played here since last year's Indian Open, so it is quite different for me. There are nerves that come with it being a home event, but it's always good nerves," said Malik, who will be making her tenth appearance in the Indian Open.

The field represents 31 nationalities – 111 players, including 29 Indians -- and carries a total purse of \$500,000 with a winner's prize of \$75,000.



Diksha Dagar has two top 10 finishes in LET this season.

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