

# Hitaashee takes the reins

## Zara Tied-2nd, Pranavi Tied-4th In Hero Women's Indian Open

Moushumi.Bora@timesofindia.com

**Gurugram:** Stephen King is her favourite novelist but there were no Friday horror stories on the course for Hitaashee Bakshi. No early morning jitters too, as she teed off at 6.30am "like a normal practice round" on her home course. Up-and-down pars on the opening holes of the DLF G&CC course set up the momentum and confidence for the rest of the journey as she returned with a bogey-free five-under 67 to lift her score to seven-under at the \$500,000 Hero Women's Indian Open.

It's an irony that the book she recently finished has the frightening title "Dead Girls Don't Lie." The friendly 21-year-old, with a smile to charm the clouds away, kept the Indian hopes alive on the halfway stage along with amateur Zara Anand (tied-2nd) and Pranavi Urs (tied-4th) as overnight leader Vani Kapoor descended from a rollercoaster ride with a two-over round and a tied-seventh place.

There were a few lucky putts, Hitaashee admitted with glee. "I did not expect some long putts to go in. At holes seven and eight, they were at least 40-footers."

A bogey-free card is always a sign of great focus and patience, but the local who had seen the course bite back often was not worried about the drops. "I wasn't even thinking about it because sooner



**MOVING AHEAD:** Hitaashee Bakshi on Friday

or later you will be making bogeys here. For me, it was more about how many birdies I can make."

Keeping an eye on sister Jahanvi's outing -- the elder sibling was placed 30th -- Hitaashee recalled how it all started. "My mom was the one who pushed us to play golf when we were five and seven. I think she fell in love with the sport. Jahanvi and I are total opposites, she is the beauty and brains, the software engineer. I have never been good at studies so I'm glad that mom had this idea of us playing sports," said the introvert who always lit up in 'pro' mode.

With home comforts just 10 minutes away from the course, it was time to switch off and look forward to "enjoy the magic of mom's cooking" before she took a peek at the third-round draw and pin sheets in the evening.

It was Sunita's curries that had kept Hitaashee going during the Airbnb hopping during her ten tournaments on the European circuit this season.

Gaurika, Zara's mother, walked the course as she watched her teenage daughter make a final flutter of birdie-double bogey-birdie in the fading light to card in a two-under for a total of six-under, one stroke behind Hitaashee. Pranavi scored a five-under to rise to T-4th, her cousin Vidhatri missed the cut which was placed at eight-over.

**Second round leaderboard:** -7 Hitaashee Bakshi (Ind) 70-67; -6 Verena Gimmy (Ger) 68-70, Zara Anand (Ind-am) 68-70; -5 Chiara Tamburlini (Sui) 71-68, Pranavi Urs (Ind) 72-67; Selected Indian scores: -3 Vani Kapoor (T7); Par-Avani Prashanth, Amandeep Drall (T14); +6 Diksha Dagar (T46).