

Hitaashee extends lead as Indians take the spotlight



Hitaashee.

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The last time an Indian stood atop the leaderboard every day going into the final day's play at the Hero Women's Indian Open golf was never. Neither have there been five Indians in the top-10 at the end of third day's play of the competition in all its 16 editions so far.

On Saturday, Hitaashee Bakshi opened up a three-shot lead to not only conti-

nue her stay at the top but also raise real possibilities of an Indian winner for the first time in nine years.

Aditi Ashok is the only other Indian to win at the DLF Golf and Country Club here way back in 2016.

It started with a birdie on the very first hole, the first of six, as the local favourite never lost her composure or control on the proceedings to card a two-under 70 for a three-day total of 9-under 209.

Despite the skies opening up for a pleasant and sunny day, the course continued to test the players,

who struggled to control the shots on both the fairways and the greens.

"I'm just going one shot at a time, it's my home course, no pressure. It was exhausting on the back nine because the rough really did get to me and there was a birdie-bogey-birdie-bogey thing that started but I'm really glad that I followed it all through the end," the visibly tired but beaming 21-year old, in her first full season on the Ladies European Tour, said.

Her only low point on an otherwise perfect day

was on the seventh hole, where she dropped a couple of shots for a double bogey.

"It was a 92-yard shot for me from the middle of the fairway and I chunked it, which was very unexpected of me, then there was a 40-yard chip that I again chunked but I really held my calm from the seventh green to eight tee," Hitaashee admitted.

England's Alice Hewson, who finished tied 11 last year, was the closest with a card of 69 to total 210 while Singapore's Shannon Tan kept her Or-

der of Merit win hopes alive four shots behind, tied with Avani Prashanth and Zara Anand among others. Pranavi Urs and Vani Kapoor were the other Indians in top-10.

Top leader-board (Indians unless stated): 207: Hitaashee Bakshi (70-67-70); **210:** Alice Hewson (Eng, 69-72-69).

212: Pranavi Urs (72-67-73).

214: Avani Prashanth (73-71-70), Kelsey Bennett (Aus, 71-71-72), Shannon Tan (Sin, 68-73-73), Lisa Pettersson (Swe, 71-69-74), Zara Anand (68-70-76).

215: Kajsa Arwefjall (Swe, 73-72-70), Vani Kapoor (67-74-74), Verena Gimmy (Ger, 68-70-77).