

# History beckons Indian golf

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**Gurugram:** Hitaashee Bakshi said she would be sleeping well despite shouldering the burden of breaking a nine-year home drought at the Hero Women's Indian Open. "No pressure, just go out and play. The crowd is just giving me more of an edge, a push," said the third-round leader, with an air of self assurance. It is perhaps the 21-year-old's ability to deactivate whenever she walks off the course that keeps her composed as the competition boils down to the Sunday finale at DLF G&CC.

Hitaashee stretched her lead to three strokes at nine-under with a two-under 70, ahead of Englishwoman Alice Hewson, who was lurking around at six-under after her 69. Pranavi Urs was holding steady until her double bogey on the tricky 14th returned an overpar score while amateur Zara Anand had a difficult day with a 76. Pranavi was third at four-under while Zara found herself in tied-fourth along with Avani Prashanth (70) in a group of five at two-under.

All eyes were on Hitaashee on the 18th as she found herself on the edge of the greenside bunker. She was ready

to concede a bogey but her chip ended up to three feet to the hole. That par save was actually a perfect end to the fighting two-under round.

"It's just been such a long day. In the last few holes, I was making birdie, bogey, birdie, bogey. So I was wondering if I was still leading or not? Let's just finish the hole and see what happens."

## HERO WOMEN'S INDIAN OPEN

A day before, after a bogey-free round, the local pro said she was not afraid of dropping shots on a demanding course where you have to take your medicine and move on.

The double bogey on the par-4 7th hole did annoy her a bit. She "chunked" a 92-yard shot from the middle of the fairway. "That was very uncharacteristic of me," she rued. Her 40-yard chip was again a mishit. That brought her back to square one after her two birdies had increased the distance from her rivals.

A pep talk from her caddie as they ambled towards the 8th tee box restored the calm as she drilled in three birdies in four holes, and then the pendulum swung again with two bogeys and a birdie before her par hold.

That smile was finally back as she stepped out of

'play' mode to be greeted by a bunch of giggly signature-seekers.

Ranked 108th on the LET Order of Merit, Hitaashee can rise to 31 with a two-year exemption status with a win but she is not looking at the numbers now. "I feel like I have focused so much on golf in my life that in recent times I have become the kind of per-

son who's just gonna switch on when I'm on Tee 1 on Sunday. Then we'll see what happens."

She can't recall if she is playing her seventh or eighth Indian Open, but this is the most comfortable she has been because of her half-card on the LET. "I feel like I'm so familiar with the field now. I always used to feel very nervous and excited because this used to be only one LET event that I used to play. But now, since I'm on tour, it just feels very natural that this is another destination that I am at."

**Third round leaderboard:** -9 Hitaashee Bakshi (Ind) 70-67-70; -6 Alice Hewson (Eng) 69-72-69; -4 Pranavi Urs (Ind) 72-67-73; -2 Avani Prashanth (Ind) 73-71-70, Kelsey Bennett (Aus) 71-71-72, Shannon Tan (Sin) 68-73-73, Lisa Pettersson (Swe) 71-69-74, Zara Anand (Ind-am) 68-70-76.