Phatlum regains Women's Indian Open title, after a 14-year gap



Thailand's Pornanong Phatlum with the trophy. HT

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GURUGRAM: The Arnold Palmer-designed layout at the DLF Golf and Country Club can resemble an old railway line. Sparsely used now with traffic routed through the modern line running nearby, it is now a nine-hole course. The Gary Player-designed course, a mean layout, is what the men's DP World Tour or the Ladies European Tour series held in Gurugram have to contend with.

The last time Thailand's Pornanong Phatlum was at the course was 14 years ago when she walked away with a third win in the Hero Women's Indian Open. She won it back-to-back in 2008 and 2009 when it was part of the Ladies Asian Tour. And when she won again in 2012 it had become a Ladies European Tour (LET) stop.

RESULTS

277 (-11) Pornanong Phatlum (THA)	72 71 69 65
281 (-7) Vani Kapoor (IND)	73 69 69 70
284 (-4) Shannon Tan (SGP)	68 77 67 72
285 (-3) Sara Kouskova (CZE)	69 72 73 71
285 (-3) Pranavi Urs (Ind)	70 70 73 72
286 (-2) M Simmermacher (ARG)	68 72 73 73
287 (-1) Tvesa Malik (Ind)	71 73 71 72

She went away to feature on the LPGA for many seasons, recording 31 top-10 finishes there. The Thai had lost her card there and was on its feeder tour the last two seasons. But when she returned this week, on a sponsor's invite, many waited to see how the now 36-year-old would tackle the course.

On Sunday, Pornanong showed her level. She shot a brilliant 7-under 65 in the final round for a four-shot victory in the $500,000 event, her third success on LET, which assures her playing rights for next year on the tour.

India's 32-year-old Vani Kapoor held a one-shot overnight lead, raising hopes of a home winner after Aditi Ashok's success in 2016. Despite an early bogey, she was one shot up after a birdie on the eighth, only for the nerves to tell.

Vani missed a simple five-footer for birdie, allowing Pornanong to draw level, and then bogeyed the 10th. A card of seven birdies and five bogeys was not bad, but it was too little against a world-class player like Pronanong.

One shot back overnight at T2, the Thai was brilliant. Her bogey-free 65 included five birdies on the front nine and two more on the 15th and 16th. It gave her a two-shot cushion. Her second shot on the elevated 17th ran off to stop on the green-side rough slope, but she saved par. That meant no late slip up.

The winning lead became three when Vani bogeyed the par-5 18th. She walked away with a wan smile, although the performance could help the domestic four-time Order of Merit winner return to the LET next season.

"It feels like a dream. Winning the same event four times is not easy," Pornanong told the media. "I fought well...my putting was so good." She banished any retirement thoughts. "I feel like I'm still good. I will continue playing on the tour. I want to make more wins."

Vani faded away on the back nine but Pornanong said: "Everyone was getting tired because of the sun and heat." And "very narrow fairways, firm, slopy greens. Everything has to be perfect."

The diminutive Indian said: "I gave it my best, 100 per cent, and everything went to plan. I don't think I could have done anything more."

Defending champion Shannon Tan of Singapore finished third (3-under aggregate) after an even par 72. Pranavi Urs, the Asian Games champion and fourth overnight, two shots off the lead, carded 72 to finish T4 with Czech Sara Kouskova.

"This is definitely not the result I wanted. I wanted to win, especially with the way I've been playing," said Pranavi, the LET player who has battled a stomach issue this week.