Vani in the van for the first time ever in a Ladies European Tour event

The 32-year-old veteran, in unfamiliar territory, takes a one-stroke lead over defending champion Shannon and three-time winner Pornanong

GOLF

Uthra Ganesan
GURUGRAM

Vani Kapoor was in unfamiliar territory on home ground on Saturday. The 32-year-old, a veteran of the Hero Women's Indian Open, topped the leaderboard with another brilliant round going into the final day, raising hopes of an Indian winner for only the second time ever but well aware of the challenge ahead.

Vani shot a 69 for the second consecutive day to take sole lead with a three-day total of 211, one ahead of the two former winners – defending champion Shannon Tan of Singapore and three-time winner Thai Pornanong Phatlum.

Pranavi Urs and Magdalena Simmermacher were a further stroke behind to complete the top-five. Swiss Chiara Tamburlini, who led the first two days, faltered on the notoriously tricky DLF Golf and Country Club course, going seven-over 79 for the day to be tied 10th at the end of Day Three.

Vani sunk three birdies on the front nine, then picked up two more on the back before dropping a couple of shots to round off with a bogey on the 18th to take lead in a Ladies European Tour event for the first time ever. She, however, admitted she was not thinking too far ahead, with reason.

Last year Hitashee Bakshi, another regular on the course, took a three-shot lead going into the final day, only to stumble under pressure and finish third. Aditi Ashok remains the only Indian to win the title in 2016.

A couple of groups ahead, Shannon proved why there were no guarantees on this course. Having endured a horrid run on the front nine on Friday, Shannon found her groove with five birdies on the first six holes before making the turn.

The last nine were more eventful with three birdies and bogeys each as she jumped to 212 with everything to go for on the final day.

Top scores (Round 3): 211: Vani Kapoor; **212:** Shannon Tan (Sin), Pornanong Phatlum (Tha); **213:** Pranavi Urs, Magdalena Simmermacher (Arg).



Chilling out: Pornanong and Vani share a lighter moment on day three. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT