

Under the shadows of the stars

Youngsters from state looking to make the most of the tips they receive from top golfers in Pro-am event yesterday

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Professional golf is yet to catch the imagination of the city. But it surely is making its presence. A bevy of stars, including European Tour winner Rikhy Davies and 2002 PGA Championship winner Rich Beem, former US amateur champions Byeong-hun An and Peter Liethem, will line up to tee off the third Gujarat Kensville Challenge, at Kensville Golf and Country Club today.

A host of Indian stars, including Gaganjeet Bhullar, who won the tournament in its inaugural edition, last year's runner-up Rahul Gangjee, Shiv Kapur and Gaurav Ghel, who will lead the local challenge.

The presence of stars surely bodes well for local golfers who will look to pick up a thing or two from them.

Promising youngsters, Varun Parikh and Anshul Patel were excited after teeing off with the likes of Bhullar, who were teamed up for the pro-am along with Kairav Shah, and they could not stop gaga over it.

"It is great to play with a champion. He is simply superb, piling on putts," Anshul said. "He is one of the best strikers of the game in the country. I feel. Everything he hit today landed in the centre," said 15-year-old Varun, a top amateur in his category. "Of the 18 holes, we had birdies in nine of them. And it is all because of him," he added.

"Watch out for him in this tourna-



Gaganjeet Bhullar's winning team with Reliance president Parimal Nathwani

FOR THE RECORD

Pro-Am Winner: Gaganjeet Bhullar, Varun Parikh, Kairav Shah and Anshul Patel

Pro-Am runners-up: Carlos Aguilar, Manhar Gohil, Pranay Parikh and Manish Choksi

Closest to the Pin: Sameer Senha
Longest Drive: Parthiv Mehta

ment. He has done it before and I am sure he will do it again," 17-year-old Anshul prophesied.

But beyond their youthful exuberance, the youngsters regaled at the opportunity to play with one of the top golfers in the country. "He basically talked about the mental aspect of the game. I usually start thinking about the score as the game progresses. He advised me to desist from it as it has a negative impact. He suggested that I

rather enjoy the game without any worry," Varun added.

"I got excited pretty quick. He suggested not to try too hard and just relax while playing the shot," Anshul added. Bhullar, too, was full praise for the youngsters. "I had some really talented guys to play with today. The guy with the left-handed swing (Anshul) was the best I have seen in recent times while the other one (Varun) needs to work on his temperament. However, overall they have a very good game and I am sure with time they will progress," the Kapurthala-based prosaid.

Talking about the importance of a tournament like Kensville Challenge, Varun said, "A tournaments like this will benefit players like us. It is your chance to see some top players from Asia and some really talented players from Europe together. We don't get that chance often here."

Looking to watch champs

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Parina Patel hogged the limelight with a hole-in-one last year in a tournament organised by The Ahmedabad Elite Golfers Association. Though the local circuit is not that strong, the youngster has been creating a niche for herself with some consistent performance over the years.

Fresh from her recent win in the Western India Inter-School Championship, Parina opened up to *Mirror* she talked about her future, the future of golf in the city and her own aspirations from the European Challenge Tour's Kensville Golf Challenge. Talking about her famous hole-in-one, the 13-year-old said, "It was my most memorable win." Turning the clock back, she said, "I played a regular shot and couldn't realise that it was hole-in-one. And when I realised, I was delighted."

But not someone to sit on laurels, Parina feels that she needs to work on her long game. The youngster, who attended a golf clinic on Tuesday from Major winner Richard Beem, was ecstatic when the American praised her swing. "Though short, such clinics really help players like us. He praised my swing. But he also suggested I work on my short game. He talked to us about the importance



Parina shifted to golf from badminton

of a strong short game," she added.

Parina also relishes the prospect of watching some talented European and top Indian golfers in Kensville Challenge. "I will be one of the volunteers there. It is my first association with a tournament of this magnitude. I am very excited as it will help me observe some very good golfers from close. I hope to make the most of the opportunity I get."

When talks venture towards the scene of golf in the city, Parina looks confident. "The city is growing in terms of golf. When I joined there were only a few juniors but now we have some strong contenders. I think Ahmedabad will reap the rewards in the near future," she said.