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MORE THAN JUST A BUDDY

Caddy Plays Important Role In Golfer's Success Now

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Ahmedabad: With Jeev Milkha Singh's withdrawal, Gujarat Kensville Challenge 2011 has certainly lost much of its sheen. But there are some unsung heroes, who may not be as big stars as Jeev, Arjun Atwal or any of the golfers in the fray at India's first ever European Challenge Tour event at the Kensville Golf and Country Club course here, who are regarded very highly and whose advice even Jeev or Atwal wouldn't dare to overlook.

There are stories about how Ali Jaan, younger brother of Ali Sher, India's first professional winner of the Indian Open in 1991 and Arjun Atwal's caddy, helped Mike Cuning of USA win his first Indian Open title at the Delhi Golf Club (DGC) in 2003. Cuning was about to play a shot when Ali Jaan forcefully asked him to change his iron, much to the American's surprise and displeasure. But Ali Jaan insisted and Cuning went on to win that round. From there on, Cuning blindly obeyed whatever Ali Jaan said and finally emerged triumphant. Ali Jaan



Jeev Milkha Singh with Gurbinder Singh and (R) Raju Sharma

caddied for Atwal when he won the Hero Honda Masters at the Delhi Golf Club in 2004 and in the very next tournament helped Mardan Mamat of Singapore triumph at the Indian Open at the same venue.

"You know seeing the grass on the fairway and the greens how the course will behave and we tell the golfers accordingly.



This comes through experience," said Ali Jaan, who works at the DGC when not caddying for Atwal.

Ali Jaan is caddy for top-seeded Italian Alessandro Tadini here and could be seen giving tips to the Italian whenever he was in trouble. Tadini finally finished at 2 over par after the first round.

"We generally come three days before a tournament to study the course," said Raju Sharma of Indore, who is Day One leader Md Siddikur Rahman's caddy here. Raju Sharma was former India No. 1 Mukesh Sharma's caddy for the last 25 years before he joined Siddikur's camp.

"A caddy plays a very important role in a golfer's success and we share a very good relationship," said the Bangladeshi golfer Siddikur, adding, "A good caddy will know what is going through a golfer's mind without even looking at him. He will

know when a golfer is tired, hungry, wants a glass of water or what iron to give for which shot and, more importantly, provide inputs in different situations during the course of play."

Gurbinder Singh, Jeev's caddy for the last 25 years, said the role of a caddy these days was not only confined to picking the golf bag or following the golfer on the course. "Golf has become very professional and the caddy should be aware of the player's game, the course and also how to pull the golfer up if he is down and out," said Gurbinder, who was Jeev's classmate at DAV College in Chandigarh. "I have become so much attached to Jeev and I understand his game and mind so much that I hardly caddy for anybody else. I even accompanied him to Thailand and Malaysia for two tournaments," said the man, who caddies for another Chandigarh lad Sujjan Singh in Jeev's absence.

"I felt really bad that Jeev couldn't play at his signature golf course but Sujjan is a Chandigarh boy and also promising, so I wanted to help him here," said Gurbinder.