

# Gangjee takes opening day lead at Gujarat Kensville Challenge 2012

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Rahil Gangjee ignited hopes of another Indian win at the second staging of the Gujarat Kensville Challenge 2012 as he signed in for an impressive four-under 68 on the end of the opening day of the European Challenge Tour event on Thursday. Gangjee seemed to continue from where he had let off last at the Asian Tour Qualifying Final Stage as he moved to six-under through 12 holes, before finally settling for a four-under 68 on the opening day at the Kensville Golf and Country Club on Thursday. That score of 68, which included seven birdies and three bogeys held out for the lead on the first day.

As India celebrated its 63rd Republic Day, Gangjee, whose birthday falls on the same day as that of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, held the Indian flag aloft at the top of the leaderboard.

Fellow Indian Shiv Kapur, also making his Challenge Tour debut, shot a bogey-free 69, which gave him a share of the second place with two others, American Dodge Kemmer and the seasoned Gary Lockerbie.

Interestingly Kemmer had tied with Gangjee for the second place at the Asian Tour Qualifying School Final Stage last week.

There was a truly international group of seven players at tied fifth place with players of six nationalities bunched together at two-under 70. The group included Manav Jaini of India, two Swedes, Jens Danthorp and Bjorn Akesson, a South African Tyrone Ferreira, Englishman Seven Benson, German, Max Keiffer and an Austrian, HP Bacher.

Defending champion Gaganjeet Bhullar was tied for 12th with a card of one-under 71 and he shared the spot with Chiragh Kumar, winner of the PGTI Order of Merit last season, and Ranjit Singh.

Seven other Indians, Mukesh Kumar, Amardip Singh Malik, Abhinav Lohan, Shamim Khan, Digvijay Singh and Sanjay Kumar shot 72 each and were tied 25th place.

Except for the closing bogey, Gangjee seemed satisfied with the round. He said, "I had a great opening nine with four birdies (on second, third, sixth and seventh) in first even holes. I was hitting really well and close to the pin. He added birdies on the 10th and 12th and at six-under, he looked set for a real low number. "I just wanted to go deeper (lower score) because I have learnt on Nationwide Tour in US to use every opportunity to score good numbers. This was one."

"I got to six under today it was a good job. I had a few putts but I didn't expect to do that. I hit the ball well and putt really good today, so it's encouraging."

Gangjee gave away bogeys on 13th and 14th but got back one shot on 15th. Then came the last hole bogey.

Gangjee, despite the last hole bogey was upbeat. "The bogey on 18 surprised me. I hit a rescue off the tee, don't know how but I went over 300 yards, downwind. I caught it really good. Still I will take a four-under."

On the course he said, "I guess you could say that the two nines are completely different, driving the ball off the tee is very important. The back nine you need to drive it really straight. The bogey on 13, it was simple par four, just missed the green on the right, hit my putt from off the green short and missed the short one. The next hole, 14th, a par five, I hit it into the water. You cant really see the water but you have to hit it inside a 25 yard gap, right side trees, left side water."

It's a really well-designed course, it makes you think off the tee, it makes you hit straighter shot, you're ok if you miss on the right but there's a lot of water on the left.

Kapur was especially pleased with his bogey free round, but not so happy with the putting. He parred the front nine and then the 10th, too. Then came his first birdie on 11th. "That putt at 11 really got things going, it's quite easy to get frustrated when you're playing well but not holing birdie putts, but I finally got one to drop so that gave me some momentum. Then I hit it close on 13th and missed a couple on 16 and 17 but all in all, 11th was the one where I said 'alright you've been playing steady and you've shown some patience and this is the reward'. It was a 20 foot putt."

Talking of the par-fives, he said, "You can't hit 17 in two, nine I just hit 3-wood off the tee so I didn't fancy going for the green because the angle you're coming in, you're going towards the water so I hit five iron. On 14 I hit a five iron and laid up. On the sixth it was into the breeze so didn't go for any of them in two."

Kapur added, "The course is playing tricky today, the last couple of days we had no wind and it picked up this morning and this afternoon it should blow. The greens are firming up, I don't think they're watering it much so even if you have a wedge in hand and coming downwind it's quite tough to get it close. You have a lot of putts from 30-35 feet over slopes so your pace has to be good over greens."

Bhullar began with eight successive pars before dropping a shot on the ninth the reach the turn on one over. His back nine was much more eventful though as he birdied the 12th, 13th and 14th to go two under but mistakes on the 16th and 17th meant he suffered back to back bogeys before a birdie on the final hole meant he finished the first round one under with a 71.

"The back nine was a bit better," he said, "I was a bit more aggressive and hit the ball well and there were two silly mistakes but I guess it's the first round and everybody does that so I'm looking forward to the second round."

Peter Uihlein shot 76 and Himmat Rai ended with a 77 and will need good second round efforts to stay on for the weekend.

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