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MODI PUTS IT BEYOND CHAMP | SPORT 18

CM plays golf with Gujarat Challenge winner and walks away with Rs 5 lakh prize



PERFECT COMBINATION | SPORT 20

Ahead of the World Cup, selectors are looking for the right combination of players



GA-GA-N JEET

Gaganjeet Bhullar creates history by winning the inaugural Gujarat Kensville Challenge 2011, the first ever European Challenge event held in India

PRASANTH MENON

Going into the final round of Gujarat Kensville Challenge 2011 on Sunday with a four stroke lead, India's Gaganjeet Bhullar had already set his eyes on the coveted trophy. But the trophy didn't come into his hands as easily as he had thought.

Bhullar had to thwart a late challenge from England's Matt Ford to triumph by one shot in the first ever European Challenge Tour event held in India.

Bhullar battled with his nerves during a closing round of 75 on Sunday, but his five-under par 283 was enough to overcome Ford, who signed for a round of 70 to finish just a stroke behind.

The demanding nature of the course and conditions at the Jeev Milkha Singh-designed Kensville golf course saw only six players finish under par.

England's Jamie Moul came in third place, with a round of 69 that was the best of the day while his compatriot Matthew Baldwin took the fourth place at 2-under 286.

Bhullar opened with a bogey but he recovered by picking up a shot at the third hole, which he has birdied on all four days.

But when Bhullar committed another bogey at the tenth hole saw, it seemed Bhullar's grip on the trophy was slipping away. Ford ran up successive birdies on the 13th and 14th to tighten the screws on Bhullar.

However, Bhullar remained composed thereafter and despite a bogey on the penultimate hole, a par on the last sealed his victory. Bhullar walked away with a prize money of euros 32,000.

"I'm very pleased to begin the season with a victory. Last year also, I began the season with a victory on the Asian Tour but I cherish this moment as this is my first international victory in India. It was my father's birthday on January 14, so I dedicate this win to him. I hope that this season brings me more success, and I'm now looking forward to stepping up to The European Tour," he said

'WILL TAKE TIME TO DIGEST VICTORY'

BHULLAR ADMITTED the course was challenging and Sunday turned out to be the toughest day of competition. "Today the pin positions were tough, so it wasn't easy to get birdies. On the 17th hole, I found a bad lie in a divot and ended up making bogey. So I was under pressure. But I was confident that I could still pull it off as I knew making a birdie on the finishing hole would be difficult, even though Ford was playing well.

"It will take a while for me to digest this victory, as it's a special moment in my life. Now that I've got a card on the Challenge Tour, I will have to consult my parents before deciding whether to play full-time on this Tour, as it would be a quicker way to graduate to The European Tour."

Ford was naturally disappointed to have missed out on his maiden Challenge Tour title, but could console himself with a cheque of euros 22,000. "Obviously it's very disappointing to have lost by a stroke. On the last hole, when I heard that Bhullar had made a bogey on the 17th, I tried to make a birdie to force a play-off. But I hit my approach a bit short, and failed to make the putt. But credit to Bhullar, because he deserved to win," the runner-up said

