

Gangjee, Kapur raise hopes of an Indian party at Kenville Challenge

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There was a lot to rejoice for the Indians as Rahil Gangjee (69) and Shiv Kapur (68), both of whom are making their debut on the Challenge Tour shared the lead at the midway stage of the Gujarat Kenville Challenge at Kenville Golf and Country Club, near Ahmedabad in India. The globe-trotting duo is at seven-under 137 after 36 holes.

The 33-year-old Gangjee, whose ancestry can be traced back to the state - three generations ago his forefathers lived in Kutch – now divides his times between United States, where he plays on the Nationwide Tour, and Kolkata, where last three generations of his family have resided. Delhi boy Kapur, 30, plays on Asian and European Tours, and like Gangjee is hoping to make his debut on the European Challenge tour a memorable one. His birthday, October 2, also falls on the same date as that of Mahatma Gandhi, in whose state he is now playing.

The Indian duo was closely followed by an European trio comprising, two Englishmen, Gary Lockerbie (69) and Seve Benson (68) and a Swede, Jens Danthorp (68) all of whom are at six-under 138 in tied third place. Three others, German Max Keiffer (71), Australian Daniel Gaunt (68) and American Dodge Kemmer (72) were tied sixth at three-under 141.

The cut came at four-over 148 and the casualties included Asian tour winner Himmat Rai (77-74), John Parry (73-76), Daniel Vancsik (76-75), Chiragh Kumar (71-79) and the seasoned Gaurav Ghei (78-73) and Ali Sher (73-77).

As many as 15 Indians made the cut. They included Gangjee, Kapur, Ranjit Singh (71-73) at tied 20th, Digvijay Singh (73-73), Ashok Kumar (75-70), Abhinav Lohan (72-73) and Mukesh (72-73) at tied 30th, Vinod Kumar (75-71), Kapil Kumar (73-73), Gaganjeet Bhullar (71-75) at tied 38th, Shamim Khan (72-75), Mandeo Pathania (75-72) and Manav Jaini (70-77) at tied 46th and Ajeetsh Sandhu (72-76) and Vijay Kumar (76-72) at tied 51st.

Peter Uihlein (76-72) held his nerve and made the cut on his pro debut despite a double bogey on the par-4 fourth hole.

Gangjee, had mixed feeling over his round. "I started off pretty good. I birdied 10, 11, 13, 14 and then bogeyed 16 and 18 and then I birdied just one on the way back, the sixth."

"I didn't leave too many putts to be honest, I struggled a bit today, the greens got much firmer than yesterday and somehow that didn't really help me, especially when I missed the greens, it was difficult to control the distances of my chips, it would bounce and take off. They've cut the grass down a lot so it's a little more difficult to see the green, making it more interesting. Otherwise, it wasn't bad, I played within myself."

He was a little upset at the bogeys on 16th and 18th, but added, "I was irate at that but calmed myself and continued. I didn't birdie much on the second nine, the front end of the course except the sixth."

On his 'escape' on the ninth, his closing hole, he laughed and said, "A close shave? I couldn't fit a razor blade between the ball and the OB line, it was really close. Not even an inch. If it was half a ball more it would have been out so I tried not to stand too close to the ball either! But I got it out with a decent six iron and two-putted so it was nice, almost holed the first one too so would have been a nice birdie."

Checking Kapur's score Gangjee added, "Congratulations to Shiv also on a good round. We'll see, this game is unpredictable but I hope to win. I don't think I've ever played with him in a third round or final round before."

Kapur said, "The conditions were a little easier, because it wasn't as windy as yesterday, so the pins were a little more accessible. I got off to a great start with a birdie on the tenth, which was my first hole, then managed to pick up three more shots without too many heroics. I hit lots of greens but didn't hole any really long putts, just burned quite a lot of edges. I changed my putting grip from yesterday, and that seemed to help me with my pace. If you feel like you've hit a good putt, even if it doesn't go in you can't feel too disappointed."

"The only blemish of the day was a silly bogey at the sixth hole, where some indecision on the second shot cost me dear. I left myself with a tough bunker shot, and didn't manage to get up and down. It would've been nice to have had another bogey-free round, but it wasn't to be, and I'm still in a great position going into the weekend."

Danthorp, who was tied for third, said, "I started off pretty good, played very good from tee to green, managed to hole a few putts and just kept the ball in play. That's my strategy for the whole week, rock hard greens and you have to hit the fairway and give yourself a lot of chances. Absolutely, pretty pleasing to have only one bogey – I was a little bit unfortunate because I hit a really good shot, half a metre short so it bounced down into the bunker, difficult bunker shot and two putts."

On the conditions, he added, "I think it's great, I love the weather. I hope to play a full schedule."

Gary Lockerbie, who has had two eagles was also tied third. He capitalised on another slice of good fortune to take the clubhouse lead after the morning session on the second day. The Englishman began the day just one shot off the lead set by Gangjee after he had holed out with his approach at his very first hole of the tournament on the opening day. Lady Luck smiled upon him once again as he knocked another wedge, this time a chipped shot from about 45 yards, into the cup for an eagle at the par five sixth.

"I'm really happy with that, absolutely," said the 29 year old, who already has one Challenge Tour title to his name having won the 2008 Kazakhstan Open. "Again I got quite a quick start. It wasn't really a case of holding on towards the end but just keeping it simple, making sure there's no disasters. Speaking of his eagle, he said: "You wait all year for one and the two come along in two days so there we go!

The final two rounds will be played over the weekend.

Scores:

137 S Kapur (Ind) 69 68, R Gangjee (Ind) 68 69,

138 G Lockerbie (Eng) 69 69, J Dantorp (Swe) 70 68, S Benson (Eng) 70 68,

141 M Kieffer (Ger) 70 71, D Kemmer (USA) 69 72, D Gaunt (Aus) 73 68,

142 C Brazillier (Fra) 72 70, C Paisley (Eng) 72 70, A Snobeck (Fra) 71 71, L Goddard (Eng) 71 71, R Russell (Sco) 73 69, C Lloyd (Eng) 72 70,

143 M Ford (Eng) 72 71, A Hart (Den) 73 70, B ≈kesson (Swe) 70 73, B Barham (Eng) 71 72, P Dwyer (Eng) 71

72,

144 J Gibb (Eng) 72 72, R Singh (Ind) 71 73, C Macaulay (Sco) 74 70, B Parker (Eng) 71 73, S Engell Andersen (Ken) 75 69, J Walters (RSA) 71 73, C Doak (Sco) 74 70, M Carlsson (Swe) 71 73, P Archer (Eng) 73 71, H Bacher (Aut) 70 74,

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