

Khan takes a bow

Kolkata: This was one for the record books. Keen to add another junior crown to his tally before he graduates to the amateur circuit, Rashid Khan made the most of the opportunity and won the Lalit Suri All India Junior Championship. In his last appearance at the tournament, Khan motivated himself to pull out his A-game and thwarted a valiant charge by 15-year-old Ashbeer Saini to win by seven strokes.

Carding a tournament-best final round of four-under-par 68 for a cumulative score of three-under 285, Khan's late charge on the back nine on the final day pulled him away from Saini who had led the tournament from the start and had kept pace till the front nine.

Khan, 18, has already established himself on the amateur tour with three wins in 2008, was expected to run away with the tournament. That, however, was not to be as the talented Kapurthala youngster, Saini, carded a pair of one-under 71s to open up a two-stroke lead over Khan at the halfway stage.

Khan caught up with a fine three-under 69 on the third day and the duo were tied for the lead at the start of the final round. Saini took the lead on the fourth hole but dropped strokes in quick succession to trail by three at the turn. Khan, playing in the zone, blitzed a back nine 33 and finished comfortably with the only sub-par score of the tournament. Saini finished second overall with

a tally of four-over 292. Fresh from a decent outing at the Volvo Masters of Asia, Khan said, "I was confident after my performance on the amateur circuit and the tournament I recently played in Thailand. I was slow off the blocks but focused hard in the last two rounds."

Saini won comfortably in Category B (13-14 yrs) as the next best, Rahul Ravi, finished 20 strokes behind with a four-day total of 312. Chikkarangappa finished third in the overall standings as he carded a round of one-over 73 to finish one stroke behind Saini with a total of five-over 293. Tutul Ali took the honors in Category C (11-12 yrs) as he upstaged the favorite, Honey Basoya, by a solitary stroke.

Piyush Sangwan, just nine years of age shot a one-over 73 in the first round which propelled the Delhi to victory in Category D (9-10 yrs) by a margin of five strokes. The week, though, belonged to Khan, who, on the other end of the age spectrum, could not have hoped for a better ending to a glittering junior innings.

ALL INDIA JUNIORS LEADING SCORES

CATEGORY A & B
285: RASHID KHAN (75, 69, 73, 68); 292: ASHBEER SINGH SAINI (71, 71, 75, 75); 293: CHIKKARANGAPPA (74, 72, 74, 73); 299: AMAN GURON (79, 73, 73, 74); 306: KHALIN JOSHI (77, 75, 78, 76); 307: SAMARTH DWIVEDI (77, 77, 78, 75); 309: TRISHUL CHINNAPPA (74, 81, 75, 79); 312: RAHUL RAVI (79, 77, 74, 82); 314: WASIM KHAN (77, 79, 85, 73); 315: IMAMUL HAQUE (77, 78, 78, 82)

CATEGORY C
318: TUTUL ALI (83, 78, 77, 80); 319: HONEY BAISOYA (79, 77, 82, 81); 326: AKSHATH VIDYANTH (76, 81, 89, 80)

CATEGORY D
225: PIYUSH SANGWAN (73, 76, 76); 230: PRAKHAR ASAWA (79, 75, 76); 261: SHUBHAM NARAIN (86, 83, 82)

Chief guest Saurav Ganguly poses with the young winners.



RISING IN THE EAST

Kolkata: The lush fairways and greens of Tollygunge Golf Club welcomed the Albatross family for tournament no. 11—and first of the New Year—as the tour got a flavor of the east for the first time.

Tolly and its management went out of their way to support Albatross in hosting the event. The chief coordinator, Albatross (Kolkata), P.K. Madappa, and his wife Vidya—parents of promising junior Viraj—left no stone unturned in making sure that it was a great success. The Albatross event was advertised across the region, and many juniors who otherwise don't get the opportunity to tee it up in tournaments, participated with enthusiasm.

At Tolly, 'spectator policy' was amended and parents were allowed to walk on the cart path and tree line. However, they were strictly instructed not to advise their children on the course, and to maintain a distance of at least 25 yards. Leading coach Indrajit Bhalotia, who refereed the event, praised the organizational efforts of the mums and dads.

To top it all, the weather was golf-perfect pleasant, a treat for the young golfers (and the parents). The icing on the cake, however, was

the presence of Sourav Ganguly. The former Indian cricket captain was the chief guest and gave away the prizes to the winners, who, not surprisingly, were super-excited to meet up with him. In his speech, Ganguly urged the young golfers to do well, and advised them to keep things simple.

On the course, things were exciting too. In Category B, the competition went into a play off after Ashbeer Saini of Kapurthala and Ankur Chadha (DLF Golf & Country Club, Gurgaon) ended regulation tied at six-over-par 76. There was high drama in sudden death, which took place on the first hole, in front of a big crowd: Chadha missed a putt for birdie but all he needed was a par as Saini made bogey.

ALBATROSS TOUR LEADING SCORES

CATEGORY A
76: IMAMUL HAQUE; 77: SAMRAT BASU; 84: HAMAN

CATEGORY B
76: ANKUR CHADHA (WON ON FIRST HOLE OF PLAY OFF); 76: ASHBEER SAINI; 77: ARJUN SINGH

CATEGORY C
77: MANU GANDAS; 78: VIRAJ MADAPPA; 81: JAIRAJ SINGH SANDHU

CATEGORY D
77: PRAKHAR ASAWA; 78: PIYUSH SANGWAN; 86: RIDHIMA DILAWARI

CATEGORY E
41: AADIL BEDI; 48: DEVANSH CHADHA; 71: ANANYA BARTHAKUR; 87: RHEA PURVI SARAVANAN