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Press Release

For Immediate Publication

Avantha Masters Signals the Growing Strength of India in Asian and European Golf

Gurgaon, Feb 5: The arrival of next week's Euros 1.5 million Avantha Masters signals the emergence of Indian golf on the Asian platform. The latest offering on the Asian Tour and co-sanctioned with the European Tour, the Avantha Masters amply mirrors the growing strength of the Asian Tour where like the region's established circuit, Indian golf is no longer regarded as the sleeping giant.

Even as the who's who of Asian golf and prominent names from Europe vie with each other for the top purses, the world is awakening to Indian golfing strength.

From the likes of Jeev Milkha Singh and Arjun Atwal to Gaganjeet Bhullar, Anirban Lahiri and Himmat Rai, India's fortunes has sparkled through numerous achievements victories across Asia and elsewhere.

India holds the proud record of having produced the most number of Asian Tour Order of Merit champions, through Singh in 2006 and 2008, Atwal in 2003 and Jyoti Randhawa, the country's first Asian number one in 2002.

In between those proud moments for Indian golf, others have launched their careers by securing 'wins' next to their names.

Gaurav Ghei, Feroz Ali, Shiv Kapur, S.S.P. Chowrasia, C. Muniyappa and Bhullar have all added their names onto the Asian Tour's Roll of Honour with life-changing victories.

Jeev Milkha Singh, who holds six wins in Asia and is now an honorary member of the Asian Tour, credited the Tour for giving him the platform to launch his career which has seen him secure multiple titles in Europe and Japan as well.

"This is where I started from and I will never forget that," said Singh. "I will always go back and support the Asian Tour. The way the Asian Tour has grown is fantastic to see. I feel and strongly believe that the Asian Tour will continue to grow and produce top-class players."

Atwal, who has won seven times on the Asian Tour, said the region's circuit, which has travelled to 19 different countries over the years, helped shape his growing years as a professional.

"My first Q-school was in 1995 and just to learn how to make cuts and be in contention and finally win, all those I learnt on the Asian Tour," said Atwal. "Those were the best years of my life. I still say it. I had so much fun and everyone are so close. You still see the guys out here, it's great."

Their combined success on the Asian Tour, which have lifted Singh, Randhawa, Atwal and Ghei into the top-20 of the career earnings with a cumulative haul of over US\$8 million in winnings, have sparked the emergence of a new and exciting generation of golfers.

Former Asian Games gold medal winner Shiv Kapur led the new wave by winning the 2005 Volvo Masters of Asia and since then, a string of other young guns have burst through onto the Asian Tour.



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S.S.P. Chowrasia and C. Muniyappa, who grew up through humble beginnings, claimed magical victories in 2008 and 2009 to transform their lives while Bhullar broke through last year to win his first title en route to finishing sixth on the Asian Tour Order of Merit.

Lahiri and Himmat Rai are other young players touted for a big future.

Muniyappa, who earned one rupee a day as a forecaddie during his youth, said: "It was very important (to win the Hero Honda Indian Open) because this meant a big win at a big event. I have won only once on the domestic Tour in India but this win on the Asian Tour was a much bigger title. I've learnt a lot from playing on the Asian Tour. I gained more experience from tournaments across Asia."

As the son of a greenskeeper, Chowrasia understands the hardship in making ends meet in golf but concedes that life on the Asian Tour has been a blessing. "My first full year was superb. I finished in the top-40 of the Order of Merit and it changed my life. Now I have a full card and I am looking forward to doing well."

He regretted not joining the Asian Tour much earlier. Chowrasia, nicknamed "Chip-putt-sia" for his short game prowess, had the opportunity in 1999 after finishing second behind Atwal in the Indian Open but he did not take the risk.

"Getting onto the Asian Tour was the best decision of my life. I wish I had got onto the Tour earlier on, soon after I came second to Arjun. It has been a fantastic experience," said Chowrasia.

The rise of India's golfing heroes has earned them the recognition that was once afforded only to the country's cricketing heroes.

Singh, the recipient of the Padmashri award two years ago, is a prime example. He made use of the playing opportunities in Asia during the 1990s to become a world-class player, highlighted by an irrepressible season in 2006 in which he won four times and claimed the prestigious Order of Merit crown.

Asian Tour's Executive Chairman Kyi Hla Han said he will continue to work closely with the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) and Indian Golf Union to ensure that Indian golf remains on the crest of a wave.

"We have a close association with the PGTI and will continue to seek initiatives to grow the game in India and on the Asian Tour," said Han.

Ghei, who holds three career wins, hailed the contribution of the Asian Tour towards the development of Indian golf. "One of the first steps in world golf for Indians is the Asian Tour," said Ghei. "That's where we all started from and youngsters are aiming now to get in there first. For a long time, that was the big stage for us."

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