

Kieffer edges out Gangjee in PLAY-OFF

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

With four holes to go, Rahil Gangjee was three clear of the field and seemed to have sewn up the title at the Gujarat Kensville Challenge 2012 on Sunday. But on the home straight, he faltered and allowed Max Kieffer to get a foothold, which the young German converted into a title in the first play-off hole at the Kensville Golf and Country Club. Gangjee (71), one clear of the field at the start, ended regulation play finishing at seven-under 281, while Kieffer made up the one-shot deficit with which he had started. His 70 brought him to 281 and off they went into the play-off. Here Gangjee missed a shot which he would otherwise have accomplished 99 out of 100 times – a bunker shot from the edge, which in this case hit the lip and went into the stream ahead, dashing all his hopes of ending an eight-year title drought.

In the play-off, Kieffer's drive went to the right side of the fairway, just short of the bunker but Gangjee's went into the edge of the bunker. Kieffer hit his second to the green to about 40 feet and Gangjee's 5-iron second shot hit the lip of the bunker and bounced into the stream virtually ending his hopes. Gangjee chipped his fourth to 20 feet which he two-putted for six. Kieffer safely two-putted from 40 feet for par and won his maiden European Challenge Tour title.

Kieffer won a cheque of Euros 32,000 which was presented to him by Sameer Sinha, Jaxay Shah and Jigesh Shah of the Savvy Group, the title sponsor of the tournament. Gangjee received Euros 22,000.

There was a three-way tie for third

place with Paul Dwyer (68), Andreas Harto (71) and Callum MacCaullay (70) at five-under 283.

Gangjee's second place was a big boost for the Gujarat Kensville Challenge, which in the previous year had provided an Indian winner in Gaganjeet Bhullar, who was tied 36th this time. Shiv Kapur, who had shared the midway lead with Gangjee shot 72 on the final day and ended tied ninth at one-under 287. The next best Indian was Ashok Kumar (74) at tied 28th along with Sri Lankan Mithun Perera (72), who plays mostly in India.

"The turning point was the 16th, where I missed a short one for bogey and Kieffer birdied. That gave him a two-shot swing and we were even. At some point when I was three ahead I did think the momentum was on my side and I could win, but Kieffer pulled off those two late birdies to get into play-off," said Gangjee.

Kieffer, who missed coming to India two years ago for the Bonallack Cup – an amateur event between Europe and Asia-Pacific teams – finally made it and his maiden trip was a winning one. "I was looking forward to India two years ago and then I turned professional. It was a tight finish and it really means a lot to me," said Kieffer.

Kieffer, adding, "Of course there were a few nerves on the inside, but I was delighted with how I coped mentally. When Rahil went into the water in the play-off I could afford to relax a little bit, but I still expected him to make a five so I had to concentrate. It was a great relief to roll my birdie putt close, and when Rahil missed his bogey putt, I knew the title was mine."



Max Kieffer

Col Bagga wishes winners

The Kensville Golf and Country Club course designer KD Bagga is still at the ICU in a Mumbai hospital. He is very passionate about his love for golf and also Gujarat. So he desperately wanted to be in Kensville during the European Challenge Tour event. Talking to TOI from his hospital bed on Saturday he had said: "Don't be surprised if I come to Ahmedabad on a wheel chair to watch the last day's event." He didn't come but kept following the game on the internet all through the day. Soon after Max Kieffer's win, he sent a SMS which said: "My heartiest and profoundly loving congratulations may please be conveyed to Max Kieffer and to Rahil Gangjee. What a thrilling finish it was and must have been a great moment for Ahmedabadis to witness this. I am sure that one golfer from Ahmedabad will win this honour one day."

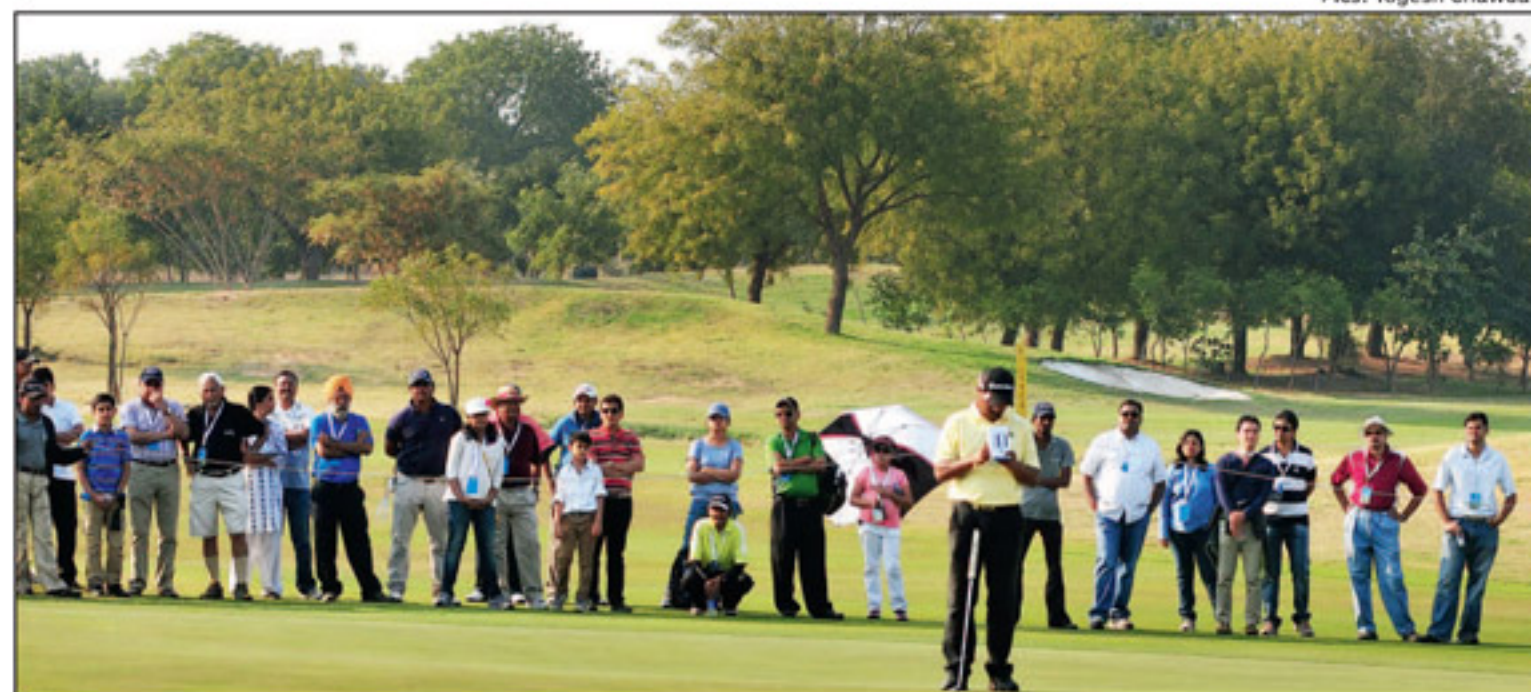
"Ahmedabad and India have been great. Obviously I could not eat the spicy food but I loved the golf course and the hospitality was absolutely great. It has been a great course and I will remember it a lot. — MAX KIEFFER



had a great time. — RAHIL GANGJEE

I wasn't going to come here initially but thanks to Kensville because they gave me a sponsor's spot to play here and it turned out pretty good. It has been a great week, loved the food, and in general

Pics: Yogesh Chawda



Chennai Cheetahs will prove to be strong contender

Brent Livermore

From the first time I heard of World Series Hockey (WSH) and then subsequently signing on for it, I have always believed that this is an idea whose time had come.

Hockey as a sport is inherently attractive to watch. All it needed was the vision and financial backing to create a sustainable ecosystem, which I believe World Series Hockey will do.

My belief in World Series Hockey has been further forti-

fied by my experiences in the training camp in Chennai with the Chennai Cheetahs last month. Everything was organized professionally with no glitches. I believe our franchise — the Chennai Cheetahs — will be a

strong contender for the league simply because of the experience of our management staff.

In Spaniard Jose Brasa, we have a coach who is not only internationally renowned, but also knows the local conditions extremely well having been coach of the Indian team. The franchise owner Mr Nannani is a passionate hockey fan and I am sure it is going to be an interesting experience having to play for a privately owned franchise. In the last decade, Indian hockey has dropped off a bit.

The WSH will help revive the sport in the country Dur-

ing the camp, I noticed from close quarters the Indian players. The potential, and skill levels, of individual players here is really good. They play with passion and their ball control is amazing. Personally I am very excited to be a part of this tournament.

With the rules being tweaked to make hockey more attractive, it will not only be exciting for the players, but from the viewer point of view as well it shall be thoroughly entertaining. I know people in India are accustomed to IPL, but

hockey has never before witnessed such a multi-city, franchise based league, nor has it been attempted before in the world. I am sure hockey will witness a whole new ball game.

I have played for Australia for

last 13 years and have 318 matches to my name, including an Olympic gold. I have enjoyed playing in many countries across the globe but some of my best time has come while playing in India for events like the Champions Trophy. Besides, I have also enjoyed playing in many competitions in many countries as a guest player in their domestic leagues, such as Holland Hoofdklasse, Australian Hockey League, New Zealand National League and I have no doubt WSH shall be right up there.

(THE WRITER IS THE CAPTAIN OF THE CHENNAI CHEETAHS.)

**STARTS
29TH FEBRUARY**

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