

# DP World India Championship

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New Delhi, Delhi, India

Delhi GC

## Shubhankar Sharma

### Press Conference



## DP WORLD INDIA CHAMPIONSHIP

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, Shubhankar, once again to the Delhi Golf Club, a club that you've grown up in, played a lot of golf. How is it to be back home?

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: Really excited. I'm really looking forward to this event. Honestly, I've been looking forward to this event since January. I kind of knew it already was coming. Inside information, I knew it was going to make it and going to be coming.

I was very excited since then. Finally we are here. Time has flown by really quickly. The course is in amazing condition. I am very happy to come back, also, because the last time I played here was 2020 and that was just one exhibition round during COVID to raise some funds, and before that I played here in 2016.

Yeah, but again, when I teed off that first hole, it felt like I never left. It felt like yesterday because I spent so many evenings here as a kid practising, just having putting competitions. Just have very fond memories from DGC. Yeah, happy to be back.

**Q. You've spent a considerable amount of time in Europe and elsewhere. Now to have guys like Rory, Tommy Fleetwood, Shane Lowry, Hovland, Brian Harman, the man who won The Open when you did so well in Liverpool. How is it playing at home in the DP World India Championships?**

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: It's amazing. 2007 or 2008 was the last time we had such a big event. Ernie Els came and we had a host of stars. Since then the Indian Open mostly has been very big.

But to have such a big event in India, the DP World India Championship now, I hope that it continues for many years now, and to have all these players come here, it's amazing.

It's quite surreal because I see them all the time, but it's in Europe, in America, and I know most of these guys. I was on the flight with Shane; he was sitting right next to me.

But to see them in my country on a golf course which is, to

us Indian players, iconic is amazing. I am really happy. I'm really thankful to DP World for making this event come true. You need such events in India. With a growing golf population, it only helps to grow the sport. I'm really looking forward to it.

**Q. This year has not been great for you when it comes to form right now. How do you see this competition? How do you see going forward, going ahead, a tough competition, a tough lineup? What are your plans for this tournament?**

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: It's the same as every event. Obviously the competition level is high, but I play in this field every week almost. Rory was there a few weeks before at the Irish Open; last week Shane. The field itself feels quite comfortable for me to play in such a field.

But the game, yeah, it hasn't been the best of years from the start. I feel like the game is coming back now. The last two events I've been decent. I've been finding some form, some good shots on the course.

I had some equipment changes and my own battles with equipment this year, changed a lot of clubs, but now I feel like I'm settled and I have things that I like.

But yeah, like I said, looking forward to this event. It's great for India, and it's great for Indian players to be playing in such a field. I'm sure they'll do well.

**Q. Have you kept an eye on what's happening on the PGTI this year?**

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: Yeah, of course, of course. That's where I started, on the PGTI. All my friends are still playing there. Yuvraj has done amazingly well, and also it being a part of the DP World Tour, it's very special. One Indian comes every year and plays on the DP World. He did a lot this year. And again, the same age, Yuvraj is just a year younger, two years younger maybe.

Yeah, I'm really happy that -- how many guys are playing here from the PGTI, 15, 20? 25, amazing. A week like this provides a big opportunity for them to play with the best in



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the world, and it also opens their eyes because I remember when I used to play such events eight, nine years ago when I wasn't a full-time member of the DP World Tour, just looking at players and how they played really opened my eyes to what I can do better to be at that level. It's a great experience for them in that way, and that's what I'm really excited about for everyone.

**Q. (Indiscernible) all of them played really well.**

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: Yeah, a lot of family kids, which is nice, and Anirban is also, which is good. But I'm also happy there are kids coming from other parts of the society also, a lot of Delhi families putting their kids into golf. It just shows how it's getting more and more popular. I see that a lot in India, also in Delhi, and even the golf clubs now are more open. They understand the limits of the sport, and especially being an Olympic sport, so it's good to see.

**Q. You're carrying the flag as a home favourite this week. Your stats over the last year, your approach shots have been great but your around-the-green stats have trended in the negative. How has your game evolved over the years, and do you see those finesse shots are at a premium around the greens? How are you preparing for that, and what's the mindset like?**

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: Yes. I've worked a lot with my coach today. I came in late last night, last evening. It was a long flight from Madrid.

Like I said, this year I've been on a journey with my clubs where I changed my clubs, the clubs that I played for 10 years at least, if not more. So once you change the shafts in the clubs, it takes some time to get used to them, and it's been a struggle this year with that. The game hasn't felt bad, but I just haven't gotten any consistency with my process on the course because it's just been a lot of change.

But now I feel like I'm at the end of my exercise, so if I can say, I see the light at the end of the tunnel. The last two weeks have been better, even with approach play, which for me is my strength. I was No. 1 in approach play last week after the second day, which I was really happy about.

That gives me a lot of confidence, and with the short game, yes, you're right; it's been up and down. I haven't been able to spend too much time on it because I've just spent all my time on my long game. But that's what my thing was today with my coach. We did a lot of work, and we'll do tomorrow.

DGC requires a lot of accuracy off the tee. Now that the

greens have changed, there are more shots needed around the greens. The rough is thick.

I think it'll be a challenge for everyone with that aspect. Yeah, my preparation is good, and I'm looking forward.

**Q. A lot of players have spoken about not using the driver this week given the narrowness of the fairways. Viktor just spoke that you can see the fairway, you can see the green. Do you think the home accuracy diminishes a little with that, or is it still a premium?**

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: No, it's the other way around, I feel, with the home advantage. See, at the end of the day, the fairway size is actually the same. It's the bushes that make it look smaller. If you visualise rough that most of the players will be hitting fairways all the time, it's the intimidation factor of just looking at the bushes and it towering over you. That's the thing.

Where the home advantage comes in is where these players have grown up playing here. Most of the Indian players, we've spent so many evenings here practising as kids playing. It just feels like home. Even now, I came here after five years. 2020 is the last time I played, but it felt like yesterday that I was in the evening practising here, play five holes, go to the annex and have something and then play four more holes.

In that way it feels more comfortable. We've seen these holes. We know what can happen. So the home advantage is even more.

And because the driver is out of play, it makes it a more level playing field because then it actually just becomes an accuracy and short game and putting, which we Indians are good at, so yeah.

**Q. I know this story quite well, but I think it's a remarkable story of how one thing can lead to another with the story of your equipment. Can you just give everyone an idea of all you had to go through from that time when you changed your equipment after 10 years and the search for the shaft and then the ball change? Can you give us an idea?**

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: Yeah, it's been a fun experience. I just want to look at it that way because I've been really excited from the start of the year to try and find something, but unfortunately met with a lot of disappointment after every week because it felt really good on the range. The thing with equipment is always at first you find it on the range, then you have to take it to the course, then you take it to the tournament. Unless you play it in the tournament, you don't really know what the

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tendencies of that particular shaft or club will be.

It started really early in the season where I was excited about a few things, didn't work, and I went everywhere in the world. I went to America. I went to Thailand. I went to Dubai. So literally covered all the corners, so I went everywhere in search of clubs and to find the right match or the right progression from my old lines and shafts.

Yeah, it's not easy because you are trying to change a few things but you also don't want to change many things in your swing because that's your one signature of playing. You want something that can match up to it, but also it's different to the old clubs because there was a reason why I had to change from them.

It's been an interesting journey. It's been a lot of travel, a lot of disappointment, also a lot of places that I felt like I got unlucky, maybe missed six or seven cuts this year by a shot. Half of them I felt like I'd made them and then suddenly the wind dropped in the afternoon and it went the other way.

It's been a testing year, but I think in every career you go through such places, and the last thing I want to do is reflect on that because now finally I feel like the game is coming back, so I should enjoy that feeling of being able to sleep in the night and not thinking about what I'm going to do tomorrow.

So I'm happy that the clubs are there and I have an opportunity to play at home with the best players. It could have been worse; I'm just thinking and searching for answers on a Wednesday just before the event. That's how most of the year has been. But I'm more at peace now, so happy.

**Q. You said you have been playing here from when you were very little. For this tournament, when you come here, do you find there's a different buzz around here, the course is different or the premises is different, the place is different? What difference do you find this time?**

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: The place is actually the same. It's just there are too many tents and chalets around the golf course, and that's exciting and good because this event has to feel like it's a big tournament, and it feels like it.

Obviously with the number of players and the buildings and the pictures, and these are some big players who are playing here; it's no joke. Rory is here, Tommy is here. They're all great players but great people also. Shane is here. It makes it a very big event.

For me, like I said, it just feels like I'm at home again because I spent so much time here as a kid. So the main structures haven't changed, the annex, the clubhouse, all of that hasn't changed. They've changed the greens a little bit, but the overall setup is the same, and the rough is likely thicker, but overall the buzz is a lot more, and today is only Tuesday. Thursday you'll see so many more players, so many more paid patrons or people who will come and watch or kids who will come and watch, which will be very exciting.

**Q. You just said something about the pictures there.**

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: Yeah, I look constantly at it. My elbow is probably hitting it into the sun or something.

**Q. I asked a similar version of this question with Anirban and I want to get your views as well. We had the event with Bryson when he stopped in India. Do you actually see India becoming the next, quote-unquote, stop for golf, for the golfing world and the golfing community? Do you think it's time for India soon?**

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: It is time for India. The thing is at the end of the day, you have to see that India is a very -- it's a growing market, and also if you look at the people who play golf and the members at DGC or DLF, they want to see big players coming to India. They want to see big events happening.

It's not easy. This course was shut for almost a month before this event happened, and knowing Delhi Golf Club, it's not the easiest to do that because people want to play golf. You have some really high-reputed members who want to play. So this just shows that they want for the event and how much they want big players to come to India and play.

So obviously Bryson came at the start of the year. It's also a great opportunity for sponsors like DP World. They do so much business in India. For them to have an event like this in India is massive. They see the market, and they see that there are more and more people who are getting into golf. So definitely it will be the next stop, and we're all really hoping for confirmation that this event hopefully will happen again every year. Didn't get a confirmation, but who is it, the CEO -- the head of communications just said we would want this event to keep happening all the years, and we want it to even become bigger.

So that's amazing to see. Also, we need something like this to happen and an Indian player to win on a big stage, and that can be the game-changing moment when they



see Indians playing well with the best players in the world. That's when there will be more eyeballs on the sport, and then we'll actually get more support at the international stage where it's not happening in India but there are still Indian players playing there.

**Q. Last week at the LET, four Indian women finished in the top 10. Obviously if the Indian men golfers replicate the same this week, what would it mean to Indian golf, and how do you think it leads to the grass-roots growth in the country?**

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: Yeah, it's a great question. I feel like we Indian men need to keep up with the women golfers, the way they are playing. It was great to see those five players in the top 10. I was keenly following. I know all of them. Really proud of them and the way they played. It's a very tough course, DLF, to be able to stand there toe-to-toe with the players. It's amazing and something that probably we can probably try and also match up to this week.

Yeah, it speaks volumes about the growth of the sport in India. When you see them involved not just playing but playing as a high level, playing really well, it's great, and yeah, I hope that we can also do the same. If there are five Indian players in the top 10 this week, it'll be the best Indian week ever in the history of golf in India and this field. Hopefully that happens. That would be a good thing, I think, for everybody.

**Q. What are the challenges that this course offers? How are the greens playing, and what do you see are the greater challenges?**

SHUBHANKAR SHARMA: The greens are good. They're slightly undulating. It's slightly different to what players remember from back in the day when they were a lot flatter and slightly on the slower side. Now they have a lot of runoff areas, so there are a lot of swales and bowls around the greens where if you end up it's not the easiest of shots from there because it's certainly sandy right now. Also, there was so much rain here, so those become collection points for water, so it's not the easiest and you don't get the best lies there.

This course is grainy with the grass and the type of grass. Bermuda on the greens is not the easiest. The rough is up, so it'll be challenging. I'm sure the Tour will find a way to make it more challenging with the pin positions. It's still a fair test of golf. I don't think there will be any complaints. People will be really happy. Most of the players I've spoken to are happy about the course. Obviously there's the intimidation factor of the bushes being there, but that's fine. It plays to Indian players because we've seen this

course before.

So I'm excited. Everyone is excited. It'll be a great tournament.

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