

50 YEARS OF CHANDIGARH GOLF CLUB

# How Chandigarh got on the golfing circuit

Former Sports Minister MS Gill, a founder member of the Chandigarh Golf Club 50 yrs ago, remembers the good old days

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Manohar Singh Gill, former Sports Minister and Chief Election Commissioner, and a founding member of the Chandigarh Golf Club, happens to be in the city, exactly 50 years after the club came into being. And he is full of memories about how the club was formed and his own long association with it and the city.

The former Sports Minister lavishes high praise on Dharam Vira, the Governor of Punjab at the time the state was divided to create Haryana in 1966. Dharam Vira, often referred to as a 'golf addict', founded not only the Chandigarh Golf Club but was also instrumental in establishing the Delhi Golf Club.

"Dharam Vira has to be remembered for promoting golf in the region," says Gill. "He set the foundation for the Chandigarh Golf Course and strongly supported it. He hailed from Bijnor and was an avid sports enthusiast and very passionate about the game." A civil servant from the British times, Dharam Vira had served as Principal Secretary and Cabinet Secretary under Jawaharlal Nehru.

Governor Dharam Vira had a lot of affection for Gill, who was the District Commissioner in Ambala in 1965. Following the division of Punjab, Gill was sent to Jalandhar to take charge as DC.

"In 1969 Dharam Vira founded the Chandigarh Golf Course... He also played



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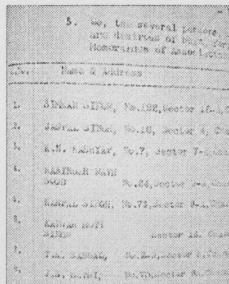
a vital role in establishing the Delhi Golf Course," remembers Gill. "Most of the area around Delhi was vacant at the time, consisting mainly of monuments and graves. Nehru was not too happy and advised him to let the area remain untouched since it was a historical site. However, Dharam Vira persisted, and it has paid great dividends for golf in India."

## Hitting the roof

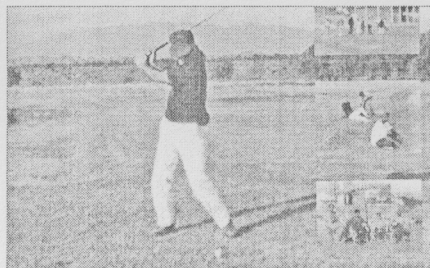
Gill took to golf like most of

the founder members, who were passionate about the game. He recalls the days when he would often hit his drive into the roof of the shed, which today lies on the right of the 10th fairway but in those days was a prominent feature on the first fairway. "People like me would inevitably land on the roof of the shed," he laughs.

"Initially I tried to get it removed as it is a temporary structure but even though I came close, we



The names and addresses of a few of the founding members of the Chandigarh Golf Club. RIGHT MS Gill recalls that "people like me would invariably" land on the roof of the shed at the Chandigarh Golf Club. PHOTOS: MANOJ MAHAJAN, SHIONA MANCO



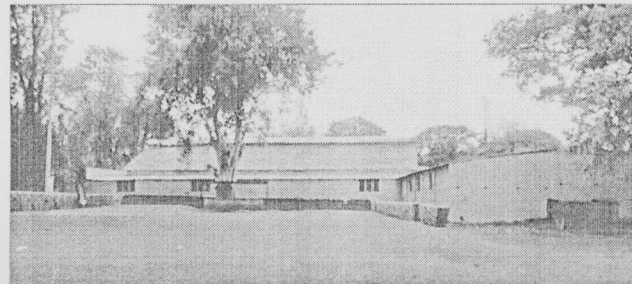
In its early days Chandigarh Golf Club did not have a very well-manicured course. COURTESY: SIMRAN SINGH

failed and it has now become a major feature within the premises of the club," he says.

Gill recounts the reason behind the shed's existence. "The Sukhna Lake was under construction. It was a project under the Irrigation Department, which had a small section here for soil testing for the bandh of the lake," says Gill. "And this was a temporary structure where AL Fletcher — an ICS officer from the Haryana cadre, a South

Indian Christian belonging to the area around Jabalpur — would don his shorts and get busy building boats with two Ramgarhias, Ram Singh and Shyam Singh from Ropar. Today the shed has no reason to be there and I would request the Governor and the Irrigation Department to remove it. It is a wart on the premises of the golf club!"

To Fletcher goes the credit for establishing the Lake Club, of which also Gill was one of the first members. "I



was a young officer at the time and was told to take up sculling to help establish the club. Having spent my school years at boarding school in Mussoorie, I had developed the courage to play all sports," recalls Gill.

"So in the month of December, I would be out on the lake early in the morning in single sculls with no life jacket or safety gear on, like they have nowadays. Had I tipped over people would only have realised the fact when they would have missed a boat at the end of the day. However, I survived so I must have been reasonably good," he adds humorously.

Which is also how he feels

about being one of the few surviving founder members of the Chandigarh Golf Club, along with Simran Singh. "I'm right here, like I told the President BS Gill. And even though I've been in Delhi for the last 20 years and play there I remember everything distinctly," he says. "I admire Simran Singh, who was a great cricketer and in my opinion was denied a chance to play for India. He had a great swing that he applied to golf."

## Chandigarh days

Chandigarh holds fond memories for Gill. An IAS officer from the 1958 Punjab cadre, he recalls his days as a young

officer when he enjoyed whisky in uncomfortable chairs with Pierre Jeanerete, the French architect who worked extensively on Chandigarh's civic projects.

"I still remember the specially designed chairs which have received great accolades and are of great value in Europe now, but were most uncomfortable if one sat in them for too long as the ropes would dig into your back," laughs Gill. "But the whisky was free and good for a young officer!" To repeat an over-used phrase, but which is a consistently accepted fact, those were the good old days. "Today on the completion of 50 years of the club, I remember Dharam Vira — ICS, Governor Punjab and a great promoter of sport," says Gill.

"And AL Fletcher, ICS, who created the Lake Club and personally built sculls. Their contribution to promoting sports in Chandigarh is immense."

Gill has words for the present and future too, words that will warm the hearts of the club members and golfers. "The Chandigarh Golf Course has produced many outstanding golfers and I see no reason why any charges should be levied on the club and its members," he says.

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