

## Faldo Series Springboard To Stardom

India's Rashid Khan is hoping some advice he received from Nick Faldo will propel him into the record books when he tees it up in the upcoming Faldo Series Asia Grand Final (March 10-12) at the Faldo Course at Mission Hills in China.

Khan, a 19-year-old from Delhi who learned the game from his uncle, a professional golfer, spent some time with the former Masters and British Open champion while he won his second successive Faldo Series Asian Grand Final at Mission Hills 12 months ago. He hopes the help he received from Nick will enable him to become the first golfer to win the title three years in a row.

Khan birdied the 54th hole to pip Spaniard Adrián Otaegui at last year's championship and, with Faldo's input, he has seldom looked back since. Subsequently, he has won the Singapore Open Amateur, as well as six successive tournaments on the Indian amateur circuit, and he is quick to credit Faldo for his spectacular run of form.

"Sir Nick was incredibly helpful," Khan said as he prepared to defend his title against a 78-strong field representing 18 countries. "He told me to stay focused, enjoy the game while on the course, not put myself under pressure, and avoid getting

angry. I have followed that advice ever since and the results are there to see."

Khan is by no means the only successful golfer in this year's tournament. Other leading competitors in the Boys' field, which is separated into three age categories – Under-16, Under-18 and Under-21 – include Gavin Green, the 2009 Malaysian Closed Amateur champion, Khan's compatriot S. Chikkarangappa, who recently became the youngest winner of the All India Amateur Championship, 16-year-old Liu Lok-tin from Hong Kong, who won the 2010 China Junior Open and Hong Kong Closed Amateur, and 14-year-old Masamichi Ito from Japan, who last year became the youngest player to make the cut on the Japan Golf Tour.

However, the biggest threat to Khan might well come from Englishman Jonathan Bell, who is seeking a unique double of his own, having won the 2009 Faldo Series European Grand Final, staged in the Olympic city of Rio de Janeiro in October.

No player has won the European and Asian Grand Finals back-to-back, but Bell, an 18-year-old English International from the historic Royal Blackheath Golf Club near London, has high hopes of becoming the first. Indeed, that is an aspiration shared by compatriot Holly Clyburn, 19, the English and French Under-18s champion, who heads the Girls' field at Mission Hills after winning their event in Rio. Were they to do so, they would join the likes of Khan and European Tour star Oliver Fisher, both of whom have two Faldo Series Grand Final victories under their belts. European Tour winner Nick Dougherty is the only winner of three Grand Finals to date.

"It's a great thrill to be heading to China to compete in the Faldo Series Asian Grand Final, and I'd like nothing better than to add to the title I won in Rio,"

Rashid Khan credits Nick Faldo for his run of six straight wins.



Nick Faldo

Bell said. "But it won't be easy. I'm told that Rashid (Khan) is a tremendous golfer and that the depth of the field is greater than it has ever been before.

"It will also be great to meet up with Nick again. He's a tremendous host and is very generous with the time he gives to all the competitors.

"That's one of the main attractions," the Englishman added. "It's not every day you can get advice from a six-time (three Masters and three British Opens) major champion, so you really should grasp the opportunity when you can."

Faldo created his eponymous youth program back in 1996 to help and nurture new generations of young golfers and he has seen the series grow from a handful of events in Great Britain into an international extravaganza, which this year will comprise around 30 events in over 25 countries throughout GB & I, Europe, South America, the Middle East and Asia.

The Faldo Asia Series has only been in exis-

tence since 2006 but it has been so successful that this year's Grand Final is the culmination of 14 tournaments in 12 countries, including China, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam, Bahrain, Malaysia, the Philippines, India, Japan, Thailand and Indonesia.

Faldo is proud of the progress his series has made and delighted to offer a springboard to a whole host of young players, including current World No. 9 Rory McIlroy, Scottish World Cup winner Marc Warren, LPGA major championship winner Yani Tseng, Ladies' European Tour member Melissa Reid as well as Dougherty and Fisher.

McIlroy, a winner of two Faldo Series titles at the Under-15 and Under-17 levels, renewed his links with the Series recently when Lough Erne Resort, the Northern Ireland club he represents on Tour, became the Home of the European Faldo Series.

"It has been a great 14 years and we hope the next 14 will be even better," said Faldo. "The next stage starts with this week's Asian Grand Final, and it's more relevant than ever now that Y.E. Yang has become the first Asian to win a major, golf has been voted into the 2016 Olympics and Asia has hosted its first WGC event and its first Asian Amateur Championship. It promises to be an exceptional event."

The winners of all the age group categories will be invited to play in the Faldo Series Europe Grand Final, to be staged at Lough Erne Resort, Sept. 21-23. The overall winner of the Boys' event will be invited to play in an Asian Tour tournament while the overall winner of the Girls' title will tee up in a Ladies European Tour event. During the Grand Final, Faldo will also initiate a number of grassroots events designed to give local youngsters access to the game of golf. ●

Special to Global Golf Post

