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THE BATTLE OF THE PILANI MASTERS AT BUNKER HILL

The aroma of fresh warm idlis mingled with the smell of newly cut grass in Princeton, New Jersey and added an exotic excitement to the famed Bunker Hill golf course. Over two hundred years ago, the battleground of the same name had witnessed a bloody battle that the British won. But it was a historic battle. For at Bunker Hill, the American soldiers discovered their own prowess, courage and almost beat back the regulars. Bunker Hill became a rallying cry of the patriots throughout the war. Today, on a warm, grey day, the tone was set for the third year of the acclaimed Pilani Masters Golf Tournament.

Battle scarred legends from years past quietly gathered around the coffee and tea bins in preparation for another battle to come. Armed with weapons of graphite, nerves of steel and a single-mindedness of purpose, they made their way to the hot vadas and chilled beers that awaited. The **Bagarias, Gokhrus, Mynenis, Nalgundwars, Padmanabhans and Paladugus** stood shoulder to shoulder, weapons by their side, their broad chests and huge biceps foretelling a grim tale of the bloodshed to come.

The last fleck of sambar wiped away, the last gulp of Corona light and Gatorade swallowed and it was time. Bob the Ranger raised his conch and beckoned the giants to battle. A grizzled three-time warrior, KC, the oldest and most active BITSian, put his ammo to the tee, took careful aim and let loose with a might roar into the winds.

It was another outstanding day. The cloudy haze and intermittent showers ensured that the closest to pin didn't come close. A 25.5 feet effort by the runner-up was narrowly pipped by **Rahul Banerjee** with a 24-footer. The greens held their ground.

With adrenaline pumping after tough negotiations with the vendor for extra chutney, **Sandeep Arora** and **Rahoul Mehra** shared honors for the best score on the front 9. **Renchy Thomas**, taking tips from Sandeep who rode in the same chariot, routed the enemy on the back 9, sharing honors with Rahul Banerjee.

Satish Paul came with weapons of mass destruction but dud



scuds they were ! With a score of 176, he won the trophy for having fought the longest, the divots at Princeton bleeding from the massacre that he wreaked on the tall blades (of grass) that stood in his way.

In the end we raised \$1,000 thanks to three great NJ companies. Radiant Systems (thanks to CEO - **Venu Myneni**), Wissen (thanks to CEO - **Satish Paul**), and DreamCricket's PavilionShop.com contributed to the BITS cause by sponsoring the arms race at Princeton.

In the villages of India, the saying went "Jitney haath, utni lathi". Venk brought Chetan, Kailash brought Ashish and Ravi brought Rahoul. Young, handsome, fearless warriors,



"I threw that one 135 yards, that one 140 yards, and the one I'm most proud of is that one-- 187 yards."



they stood by their fathers like Arjun's Abhimanyu, to chide, ride, goad and support each other to victory. And victorious they were. Ravi won. **Venk Sharma** came 3rd. Ashish came 2nd. Blood they say is thicker than water...that stood in their way.

Ah water ! Across the swollen rivers and on the sandy dunes, the battle raged for hours. The rivers rose to overwhelm the riders, the waves crashing into the bridges. But the steeds rode fast and steady, the wheels of



the chariots clattering like the rolling thunder in the hills.

Ravi Mehra came for a third time to meet his challengers. Two time champion, a

witness of heavy fighting on the 5th, 17th and 18th holes year after year, this time was no different. The passage of time has not lowered his sights, but the victories are becoming narrower and the runners-up are getting younger. With an outstanding 83, he staved off a challenge from **Ashish Sharma**, a Pilani son (of **Kailash Sharma**) who came in second with a best-ever 85. Ashish's two memorable birdies on the front nine were replaced by the two lost balls on the back 9. Ashish, the early leader, fell a notch and Ravi rode back victorious.

War is about teamwork. The Mehra-Sharma battalion (**Ravi, Rahoul, Venk & Chetan**) with an average of 96 were way ahead of the Sharma-Myneni (**KC, Ashish, Anupendra and Venu**) battalion that came second with an average of 106.

In the end there were no casualties, just battle scarred,

happy survivors with gleaming gold and crystal trophies for everyone, all winners for having come to stand their ground.

As the participants swung out of the lot, their low slung red Ferraris, Maseratis and Jaguars jostling with the Hondas, Toyotas and Fords to get out of the car park, the raft of trophies in the back windows added some more glitter to a sparkling parking lot and an already memorable day.

And suddenly it was over. As the sun set on the Battle for Bunker Hill, the only reminder of those famed warriors was the gentle whiff of Cuban cigars, the lingering aroma of the afternoon samosas and alu tikkis, and a half empty bottle of Gatorade, swaying in the wind.

But they'll be back next year. In even larger numbers. For though the Battle is over, the War of the Masters will last a lifetime. ♦