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Shiv says

The three-time Asian Tour winner has lent his name to the new EAGL

PAST EXPERIENCE tells Shiv Kapur that the ambitious new franchise-based Emirates Amateur Golf League (EAGL) is a viable concept. So much so, he's put his name behind it. The three-time Asian Tour winner talks about his ambassadorial role for golf's answer to IPL cricket and has some advice for EGF amateurs keen to put their game under the glare of the television cameras when the Ryder Cup-style league launches in November.

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Going back to 2013 when I did my own version of a golf league for professionals in India, it created a lot of buzz and excitement. It's very exciting to play in and as spectators, it gives you something new and edgy to watch.

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I think golf in general needs a bit of a shake-up. If you look at the success of the Ryder Cup, Presidents Cup and team events, they really bring in a larger audience. It also attracts a newer audience into the game. People support teams better than they support individuals.

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When I sat with [EAGL founder] Mr. Sudesh Aggarwal and his team, I thought it'd be really cool if we had something like this for professionals, but the fact that it is being done for amateurs, I feel like this is the future of golf... the first of many leagues around the world. Now that Dubai is home for me, I thought it is a perfect platform for me to associate with because this is where the real growth of the game will come from.

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Being a brand ambassador is an all-encompassing role in a way. It's about advising them from my experience in the golfing world having been a professional for 16 years now. Also, having done a golf league myself, my learnings to help them not make the mistakes I made.

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Why did my league not see a second season? A couple of reasons, I think. I didn't realise how much hard work it takes. I remember the week before the league, I was playing a Challenge Tour event in Ahmedabad and it ended that I won that week. I literally finished the prize distribution

and I was on the phone for three hours after that, trying to set everything up for the next week. I was up every night and talking to my guys, firefighting, dealing with team owners, sponsors, players.

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It also kind of coincided with a bit of a financial crisis in India as well.

Most of my team owners at the time were in the real estate business which was booming. And when year two came around, I was happy to hand the reins over to somebody else to do it but a lot of the team owners didn't have the kind of funds that they had the year before. So it kind of died a natural death.

“If I’m picking purely on one factor, it’s mental toughness...heart and guts.”

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Why will the EAGL be different? I think the number one thing, and Mr. Aggarwal sees eye to eye with me on this, is that the team owners must see value for the sustainability and the long-term success of the league. Your team owners need to go away happy. If a team owners stick with you for a long period of time, everything else falls into place. The most important stakeholder are your team owners.

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The second most important stakeholder is the title sponsor. The big value add that you’re giving them, compared to other amateur tournaments, is live television. That broadcast, which has never been done in the amateur game at the club level, I think brings a lot of value.

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From a team franchise point of view, there’s a value associated from the media side, from the sponsorship side, from the central pool, from the possible merchandise sales. There’s a whole plethora of opportunities and you can actually make it a very viable business venture, let alone the fact that there is so much pride associated with owning a franchise.

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If a luxury car company is sponsoring a professional golf tournament, they’re hoping to get the TV coverage and the eyeballs of the fans watching these events. The professional golfer is not necessarily their consumer. Those viewers, those fans are actually inside the ropes in the EAGL. So, you have a direct link to your clients.

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This is going to be very exciting for the amateurs. Firstly, you get to experience what professional golfers experience on a day-to-day basis. It’s a feel of a professional tournament, and a feel of a Ryder Cup where you’re playing not just for yourself, but you’re playing for a team or a squad. It’s live on television, so there’s nerves and butterflies.

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In a format like this you’re looking for somebody who has a good short game, good course management skills and somebody who’s willing to fight till the end and never gives up. You see a lot of people out there with a lot of ability but they have a meltdown at the first sign of adversity. Mental toughness is something that I would be looking for if I was building [one of the 24-player] squads.

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You do need a balanced squad, so you would have a couple of players that can hit it a long way. But overall, if I’m picking purely on one factor, it’s mental toughness... heart and guts. That will see you through any match.

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Ian Poulter is a classic example of somebody I’m talking about. He’s got heart. With all due respect to him, you wouldn’t pick him purely on his driving ability or his iron play. He’s a great putter, and he is mentally one of the toughest guys out there. If you

could have 24 Ian Poulters in your squad, you will never, ever lose.

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How should amateurs prepare for the EAGL? You can sometimes over-prepare I think, hype yourself for an occasion. It’s like back in school, when you have an exam, last-minute cramming isn’t going to help you. I’d say don’t even touch your clubs the day before the tournament. You see this even with rookies on professional tours. They’re out there banging balls the whole of Wednesday and come Thursday morning, they are physically tired.

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I’d also say you need to know the courses that you’re playing. You’re not playing your opponent, you’re playing against the course. Work out a good game plan and stick to it. If you’ve decided you’re going to hit 3-wood off the tee, don’t suddenly take out the driver just because you’ve made a bogey on the previous hole and you are mad. —WITH KENT GRAY

