

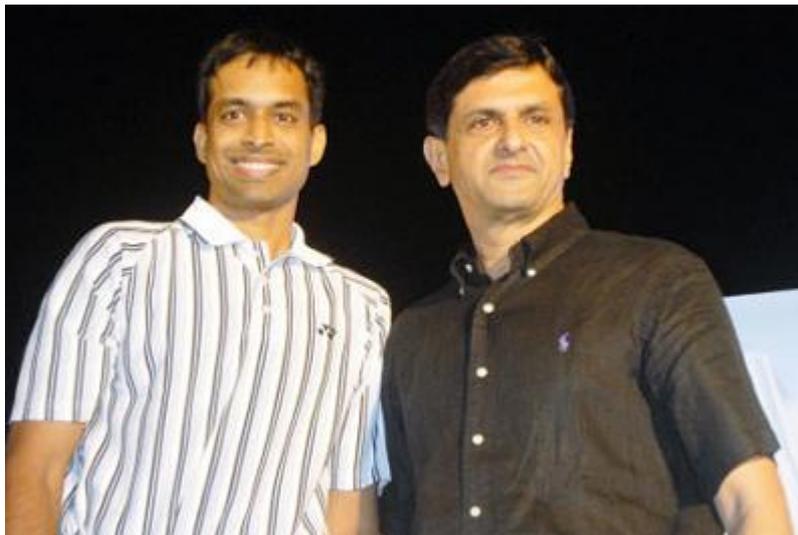


**(07 – 12 March, 2017)
Barclaycard Arena, Birmingham, England**

ALL ENGLAND – 2017: Saina & Sindhu will lead Indian Contingent

The All England Championships is regarded as the oldest and the most prestigious Badminton Championship of the World which is held annually in England. The first Championship was held in the English town of Guildford in 1898 and after hosting the event at multiple venues since then, Barclaycard Arena in Birmingham has been hosting the tournament since 1994.

So far, four Indian have done the Country proud by finishing in the top three of the Championship.



Prakash Padukone became the first Indian to lift the Trophy in 1980, while Pullela Gopichand achieved the feat in 2001. Meanwhile Prakash Nath became the first Indian to reach the final of the competition in 1947 while former world number 1 Saina Nehwal too has a runners-up medal, which she won in 2015.

The revolution wrought by Padukone inspired many of India's future Badminton stars. This was particularly true of Pullela Gopichand, the only other winner of the All England title from India. "Prakash sir was somewhere there on the horizon for me," Gopichand recalled of his early years. "I realised that that All England is the world's most prized and premier Badminton Championship. The way people talked about it, I could sense it was something big."



The 2017 edition of the tournament is set to begin on March 7 i.e Tuesday and the live broadcast of the Championship will be shown from 3 PM on the Star Sport Network. The finals of all the categories will be held on Sunday i.e March 12.

The London Olympics Bronze Medallist is set to lock horns with defending Champion Nozomi Okuhara of Japan in the opening round. Okuhara is nursing a shoulder injury and last played in November where she withdrew halfway through her first round encounter. Asked about the draw, Saina said: "The draw is good. I guess it is not an issue who I am facing, it is all about giving your best out of the best learning. Let us see how the matches go."

Saina Nehwal became the first Indian Woman to achieve the World No. 1 ranking in Badminton and win a Bronze Medal in the Olympics 2012.



The 2010 Commonwealth Games Champion, Saina Nehwal was appointed as a member of the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Athletes' Commission in October last year. "I'm an IOC-AC member and recently they have nominated me for BWF-AC as a liaison between players in BWF and IOC-AC. I haven't attended most of the meetings of IOC-AC but I may attend the meetings slated for July," she said.



Sindhu understands that the competition is going to be tough right from the start. "I have started the new year by getting into top five. Now I need consolidate my game and hopefully I would like to be in top three by the end of the year. But right now my immediate priority is the All England Open. The competition has become very tough. Even first round matches are very dicey," Telengana Today quoted Sindhu as saying.

For the first time in many years, there is no credible challenge from the Chinese in Women's Singles. With Olympic and World Champion Carolina Marin pulling out of German Open final on Sunday , there is a feeling that she may not make much impact at the \$600000 tournament starting in Birmingham on Tuesday.

In this backdrop, the Indian girls are strong favourites along with Tai Tzu Ying of Chinese Taipei and Ji Hyun Sung of Korea. Even Chief Coach Pullela Gopichand believes that the long wait for the prestigious title may end this year. "I have a feeling that we could win the title this year. Our shuttlers are doing well and many other factors are in our favour," said Gopichand, the second and the last Indian to win this title in 2001.

But the former Olympic Bronze Medallist may run into Ji Hyun Sung in Quarters. The Korean world No.3 is playing well but lost to Saina in the Premier Badminton League in January . If Saina downs Sung she may face Sindhu or Tai in the Semifinals.

The field in the Men's Singles has also opened up with Chen Long and Lin Dan losing in last week's German Open and Lee Chong Wei recovering from an Injury . India's best bet Kidambi Srikanth had given a tough fight before losing to Long last week. Though many surprises are expected in Men's Singles.

This year Prakash Padukone will be the Chief Guest at All England Championship.
