

# India's growing stature in Badminton World

Delhi, Sports, Thu, 15 May 2014 IANS Sandip Sikdar

**India's stock in International Badminton is undoubtedly high. It is being seen as one of the top Nations sport-wise as well as a major money-spinner for the game under the leadership of Dr. Akhilesh Das Gupta, President, BAI.**



**The fact that India is hosting the most prestigious events, the Thomas and Uber Cup Finals here from May 18-25, is an indication of India's fast growing stature.**

**Badminton World Federation (BWF) has started showing serious interest in India in the last four years or so and after passing each and every test, it is now considered good enough to host major events on a regular basis.**

"If you had asked me 4-5 years ago if India would host the Thomas and Uber Cup in the foreseeable future, I would have said it may not be possible," Chief National Coach Pullela Gopichand told the media here Wednesday.

It is not that things have started happening all of a sudden. Continentally, India was a major power with Prakash Padukone and the late Syed Modi. Then Gopichand carried the legacy of Trilok Nath Seth, Devinder Mohan Lal, Nandu Natekar and Dinesh Khanna, who have all made a splash on the international scene.

Those were the years (1950s-60s) when India looked good enough to be counted among the top Badminton Nations and overseas players regularly played on the Indian circuit.

India came close to reaching the Thomas Cup final twice in the 1950s, thanks to the individual brilliance of singles players. However, they lacked the depth, particularly in doubles, to seriously make a challenge for the Cup. Overall they qualified for the Finals eight times.

But their Uber Cup record is dismal, qualifying for the Final stage only thrice since the tournament began in 1957.

From this year on, the format got simplified with the top 16-ranked Teams making the cut, doing away with the qualifiers.

It all started with Pune hosting the 2008 World Junior Championships, where Saina Nehwal announced loud and clear that she has arrived big-time by becoming the first Indian to win the title. The next big event was the World Championships in Hyderabad the following year.

Then Saina and the doubles pair Jwala Gutta and Ashwini Ponnappa created history in the National Capital by clinching the 2010 Commonwealth Games gold. The next year, the BWF awarded India with a three-year Super Series contract, which has now been extended till 2017.

**The Thomas and Uber Cups will yet again give India a huge opportunity to showcase its organisational as well as player abilities in front of the world's best players along with the Who's Who of BWF that will be here for the Annual General Meeting on May 24.**

This time around, India has Teams which can really challenge the best in the world, especially in the Uber Cup where the Saina-led team has drawn Thailand, Canada and Hong Kong.

On paper, India should manage to get past Canada and Hong Kong with ease but Thailand will pose a tough challenge with current World Champion Ratchanok Intanon in its ranks. However, since the top two teams from the group qualify for the quarterfinals, India should make it without hassles.

India has two extremely strong singles players in Saina and World Championship Bronze Medallist Puserla Venkata Sindhu and with the experienced Jwala-Ashwini, they should be a force to reckon with.

However, the picture does not look so rosy in the Men's category, where the Team has Malaysia, South Korea and Germany in their pool.

Malaysia, who finished third in the 2008 and 2010 editions, will be tough with players like World No.1 Lee Chong Wei in their ranks. Also, their Doubles pairs Thien How Hoon/Wee Kiong Tan and Khim Wah Lim / V. Shem Goh are among the world's top combinations.

Though South Korea are seeded lower than Malaysia, they pose an even tougher challenge, having finished runners-up in 2008 and 2012. Parupalli Kashyap and Kidambi Srikanth have a good chance against their singles players, but it will only be a miracle if they pull it off against Korea in the doubles.

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