

## **Rituparna, Srikanth send defending champions packing**

### **Srikanth to clash with Gurusaidutt in the men's singles final**

**New Delhi: Junior national champion Rituparna Das and Thailand Grand Prix gold winner K Srikanth showed the door to defending women's and men's singles champions in contrasting styles to reach the finals of the 78<sup>th</sup> ATS Senior National Championship at the Siri Fort Sports Complex here on Sunday.**

Rituparna came from behind to upset seventh seed Sayali Gokhale 13-21, 21-13, 21-14 while K Srikanth got the better of top seed P Kashyap 21-14, 21-19 in 37 minutes.

Rituparna will now face second seed and pre-tournament favourite P V Sindhu, who defeated third seed Arundhati Pantawane 21-17, 21-14.

The semifinal encounter against defending champion Kashyap and challenger Srikanth was expected to be the highlight of the day. But the top seed was visibly hampered by the shoulder injury, which forced him to pull out of the team championship, and paid the price of being below-par against a spirited opponent.

Srikanth and Kashyap had clashed at the same stage in the last edition of the championship in Srinagar and the latter had then bulldozed his junior academy-mate into abject surrender.

But since then, Srikanth had taken big strides into the international circuit and had skipped the Macau Grand Prix Gold and Tata Open International Challenge meet in Mumbai to prepare for the nationals. This is the first time that Srikanth defeated his senior academy mate.

Srikanth was the first to get off the blocks as he won points in a cluster to open up an eight point advantage and though Kashyap managed to save two game points, the game had already slipped out of his grasp.

The second game also looked like going in the same direction as Srikanth opened up a 12-8 lead but Kashyap used all his experience to slow down the pace of the match and that helped him claw back. But just when it looked like he could take the match into the decider, Srikanth came up with a few brilliant net dribbles to clinch the game and match with a back-hand drive.

“I am very happy that my decision to drop points I earned in Macau (he had reached the semifinals last year) is working for me at the nationals. There is one more match to go and I will try my best to achieve my goal of winning the national crown,” said Srikanth.

In the women’s singles semifinal, Rituparna announced her arrival as the future of Indian badminton when she came from behind to comfortably outclass Sayali.

The Kolkata girl, who is playing for Andhra Pradesh from this year, took time to settle down against the reigning national champion and though she lost the opening game rather tamely it was clear that the youngster was gaining confidence in her abilities.

She began the second game with a positive intent and opened a big lead immediately and since then it was the more experienced Sayali who had to play catch up in the 53 minute encounter.

Both players looked to control the net exchanges and while there was not much to chose from, it was Rituparna’s ability to capitalise on any opening that Sayali provided in the open play that turned the tide in her favour.

“I had nothing to lose so I promised myself to go out and play my game after I lost the opening game. I am happy that everything came along well,” said Rituparna, who can become only the second women’s singles player after her final opponent P V Sindhu to win the junior and senior title in the same year.

### **Results (semifinal)**

#### **Women’s singles:**

2-Sindhu P.V (PSPB) bt 3-Arundhati Pantawane (PSPB) 21-17, 21-14; 15-Rituparna Das (AP) bt 7-Sayali Gokhale (AI) 13-21, 21-13, 21-14

#### **Men’s singles:**

5-K Srikanth (PSPB) bt P Kashyap (PSPB) 21-14, 21-19; 2-Gurusaidutt R.M.V (PSPB) bt 6-Sai Praneeth (PSPB) 21-13, 2-19

#### **Women’s doubles:**

2-Jwala Gutta/Ashwini Ponnappa (PSPB) bt 5-Prajakta Sawant/Aarti Sara Sunil (PSPB/KER) 21-8, 21-15

1-Pradnya Gadre / Siki Reddy (AAI) bt 3-Aparna Balan/Sindhu P.V (PSPB) 21-16, 21-18