

Mixed luck for India in BWF Li Ning Thomas and Uber Cup draw

- Men face Malaysia, Germany and Korea in Group of Death
- Women's pitted against Thailand, Canada and Hong Kong in Group C of Uber Cup

New Delhi: Hosts India had mixed luck in the draw of the BWF Li-Ning Thomas and Uber Cup with the men finding themselves in the 'Group of Death', while the women managing a considerably easier group.

The draw for the prestigious team championship, to be held in Delhi from May 18-25, was conducted here on Sunday in the presence of Badminton World Federation Manager Major Events, M Venugopal, Badminton Association of India president Dr Akhilesh Das Gupta and Chief National Coach Pullela Gopichand among others.

According to the draw, Indian men have been placed in Group C along with Malaysia, Korea and Germany with the top two teams from each group qualifying for the quarterfinal stage.

"I guess ours is the toughest group. We have Malaysia, Korea and Germany against whom we are expecting good matches. It is going to be challenging in both singles and doubles. Our group has world no 1 player from Malaysia. But we have to also take in to consideration that our players have beaten the Korea & Germany No 1. Thus, I would say that everyone has a fair chance of qualifying," said one of India's future star B Sai Praneeth after the draw.

Malaysia boasts of world number one Lee Chong Wei in singles, the Koreans and German's are known to rely on their doubles combinations in team championships.

While the men have their task cut out, the Indian women would have heaved a sigh of relief when Li Ning Marketing Director Chen Zhiben unveiled India's name in Group C of the Uber Cup draw.

Thailand, Canada and Hong Kong are the other teams in the group and India would definitely fancy advancing to the knock out stage given that the team boasts of two top-10 singles players in Saina Nehwal and PV Sindhu.

Gopichand echoed the same sentiments when he said, "I think it's an even draw in both the Cups. We have good chance of qualifying to the next stages even though it is going to be tough for everyone. In the Uber Cup, Thailand is going to be challenging opponent.

India's women representative at the ceremony, Sindhu could not hide her happiness after being slotted in a better group than the men counterpart and said they would go do the distance in home conditions.

"It's a good draw for us. We will be playing in home conditions and will give our full effort. Obviously it is not going to be easy as we have Ratchanok (current World Champion Ratchanok Intanon) representing Thailand in our group and many other tough opponent. However Saina & me along with the doubles team will give our best," she added.

This is the first time that the BWF has done away with the qualifying stage and raised the number of teams participating in the tournament from 12 to 16. The teams qualified on the basis of their world rankings with defending champions China and hosts India getting a direct entry. This will be the first major BWF tournament where Instant Review system will also be in place.

BWF Major Events Manager M Venupogal also present at the Conference said, "India has become a hub of badminton in the last few years and the national federation has proved themselves to be great hosts. I am confident

that the Li-Ning Thomas & Uber Cup Finals would be a big milestone for the country."

Groups:

Thomas Cup

Group A- Indonesia, Thailand, Nigeria, Singapore

Group B- Japan, Denmark, Hong Kong, England

Group C- Malaysia, Korea, Germany, India

Group D- China, Chinese Taipei, Russia, France

Uber Cup

Group A-China, Chinese Taipei, England, Russia

Group B- Korea, Indonesia, Australia, Singapore

Group C- Thailand, India, Canada, Hong Kong

Group D- Japan, Denmark, Malaysia, Germany