

IBL would be a game changer, say former Champions

G Viswanath: Pradeep Gandhe believe that the IBL will take Indian Badminton forward



Few among the Badminton fraternity, including the BAI, had the slightest inkling that the inaugural Vodafone-IBL (Indian Badminton League) would turn out to be roaring success. Those who travelled to Delhi, Lucknow, Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad and Bangalore were blown away by the electrifying atmosphere at all venues and the top notch quality dished out by the overseas players and many talented Indians. Former International and National Doubles Champion in 1978 Pradeep Gandhe, said that it was heartening to see overwhelming response for the league and believe that the IBL will take Indian badminton forward.

It was around the 1980s that Prakash Padukone caused the downfall of many world class opponents and won the Commonwealth Games title at Edmonton, All England and the World Cup at Kuala Lumpur. Prakash is holidaying abroad, but India's second all-England champion P. Gopichand is in the thick of it. ``Well, anything to do with Badminton in India, Prakash's blessings will be there. But what I would like to say is that the perception has changed now. We used to queue up to buy a ticket for Rs. 50 to see

Prakash play from the mid 70s through to the mid 80s. Today people are scrambling to buy a ticket for Rs. 2000.

After seeing the league at close quarters right from the inaugural match in Delhi to the semi-finals in Bangalore, Sharma predicts that the IBL would prove to be a game-changer. ``The IBL is going to change the future of Indian Badminton. It would give platform for the junior to rub shoulders with the best in business. Did anyone imagine that India No. 1 junior Harsheel Dani (Junior National Champion) would get to train and practice with the world No. 1 Lee Choing Wei. K. Srikanth stretched Chong Wei to three-games; his confidence will be high now.”

Attractive Package

The singles winner at a premium super series, like the Korean Super Series, stands to gain by \$ 20,000 or \$ 25,000. But in the IBL Chong Wei would receive \$ 1,35,000 and Saina Nehwal \$ 1,20,000 as participation money. Even the junior players attached to franchise would receive \$ 3000 each. The players would get the best deal from now on. Maybe from the next year the format could change with a home and away schedule and with two more franchises. Other than IPL, it’s only in Badminton that a franchise-based tournament can succeed in India.”

Pradeep Gandhe, member of the IBL Governing Council and Vice-President, BAI said: ``The BAI has been pleasantly surprised. The IBL has been magnificent. The feedback has been great with more people keen to own teams. The IBL is the best to have happened to Indian Badminton. The spectators have turned up in big numbers at all venues. India is a likable place for the foreign players; hope they become ambassadors and spread the word to the Chinese. We have run a successful IBL without the Chinese.

All I can say that the Indian Badminton will appeal to the youngsters and flourish.”