

Sweet win in Switzerland: HS Prannoy clinches Swiss Open GP Gold Badminton Title

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Basel: Up and coming shuttler H.S. Prannoy clinched his second Grand Prix Gold Badminton tournament title by notching up a straight game victory over Marc Zwiebler of Germany in the summit clash of the Swiss Open on Sunday. Seeded 13th in the USD 120,000 tournament, Prannoy outclassed seventh seeded Zwiebler 21-18 21-15 in a 45-minute final.

In 2015, it was Kidambi Srikanth and this year Srikanth's practice partner HS Prannoy, who clinched the men's singles title in Basel on Sunday. Prannoy had survived a big scare in an exciting semifinal played late on Saturday. From the jaws of defeat, Prannoy sealed the final berth by halting the dream run of unseeded Chinese Taipei's Tzu Wei Wang 12-21, 21-14, 23-21 in an hour.

BAI President Dr. Akhilesh Das Gupta on Monday heaped praise on HS Prannoy for clinching the Men's Singles title at the Swiss Open Grand Prix Gold and announced a cash award of Rs 5 lakhs for his stupendous performance at Basel. "This is a proof of increasing competitiveness among the Indian players and an inheritance of global standards uplifting the Indian Badminton," Dr Akhilesh Das Gupta said.

"It is yet another feather to the cap of Indian Badminton Players who are constantly displaying their command and portraying their authoritative abilities on the game all over the world."

In the Asian Team Championship held in Hyderabad last month, Prannoy won all his three singles matches to help India bag historic bronze medal.

"I am ecstatic. It was a very tough week for me as the conditions were challenging. The shuttles were very fast and it was very difficult to control. Both my opponents in the semis and final were hitting very hard. They were also playing really good net game. I made lot of unforced errors in the semis but happy that I could somehow manage to pull out a fantastic win. Today I was confident to win the final," an elated Prannoy told TOI from Switzerland.

Chief National Coach Pullela Gopichand is very happy with his trainee's success. "It was a great win by Prannoy. He played an excellent game and made very few unforced errors against the German today. I hope to see this title gives him the much-needed confidence to move ahead and bring more success in future. Overall, I am happy the way he played this week," said Gopichand.

The 23-year-old Prannoy, who had won the Indonesia Open Grand Prix Gold in 2014, had been in fine touch with wins over higher ranked players, including Rajiv Ouseph of England, in this tournament.

Prannoy began the match on a confident note and surged to a 7-4 lead in the first game before the German fought his way back into the match. The two rivals were tied at 18-18 and it was from there that the Indian took three straight points at a crucial juncture to take the opening game 21-18.

With the opening game in his pocket, Prannoy grew in confidence as he outclassed his more experienced German rival in the second game to win the match. The Indian led the second game from start to finish with the German playing a catch-up game.

Prannoy opened up a 3-0 lead and then increased the gap to 13-8. Though Zwiebler narrowed down the gap in score line a bit, Prannoy was in no mood to squander the advantage and held on to his nerves to take three straight points towards the end to clinch the second game and the match.

Prannoy's road to triumph

First round: Beat Kalle Koljonen (Finland) 21-19, 21-19

Second round: Beat Lars Schaenzler (Germany) 21-16, 21-13

Third round: Beat 6-Rajiv Ouseph (England) 21-13, 21-18

Quarterfinal: Beat 16-Tanongsak Saensomboonsuk (Thailand) 21-18, 22-24, 21-9

Semifinal: Beat Tzu Wei Wang (Chinese Taipei) 12-21, 21-14, 23-21

Final: Beat 7-Marc Zwiebler (Germany) 21-18, 21-15

H. S. Prannoy (pictured here on the podium with Marc Zwiebler) will get a boost of over 4000 points from his Swiss Open performance and that will move him from 6th to 4th among Indian shuttlers in the Race to Rio standings. However, he is still 7000 points out of the top 16 and India is still waiting for a second shuttler to join that exclusive group in men's singles to make the cut for Rio.

"It won't be easy because I hardly have any time to rest or practice. In a week, I will be playing at the Indian Open Super Series and then I will play the Malaysia Super Series instead of the Senior Nationals as I wanted to give myself maximum chance to qualify for Rio.
