

What the foreign Players will bring to the IBL: Dev Sukumar

Foreign Players in the IBL:

Hyderabad Hotshots: Taufik Hidayat, Tanongsak, V Shem Goh, Lim Khim Wah

Mumbai Masters: Lee Chong Wei, Marc Zwiebler, Tine Baun, Vladimir Ivanov

Banga Beats: Hu Yun, Tai Tzu Ying, Carolina Marin, Carsten Mogensen

Awadhe Warriors: Chong Wei Feng, Sapsiree T, Markis Kido, Mathias Boe

Delhi Smashers: Wong Wing Ki, Tan Boon Heong, Koo Kien Keat, Nichaon Jindapon

Pune Pistons: Nguyen Tien Minh, Juliane Schenk, Joachim Fischer, Tan Wee Kiong

Sure, the IBL doesn't have Lin Dan, Chen Long or Wang Yihan, but it can still boast of a stellar International cast. There are several top-class International players in the fray, and they're sure to bring a rich mix of skill, athleticism and power to the event.

For a start, there is Lee Chong Wei (Mumbai Masters), an epitome of speed and athleticism. Chong Wei is neither the most skilful player around, nor the most powerful, but he compensates with his great speed, solid defence and accuracy of shot-making.

Taufik Hidayat of Hyderabad Hotshots is a different kind of player. Hidayat is certainly not the most athletic at the moment, but his skills will remain untouched by time. Hidayat epitomises craftiness in badminton, and even if he's unlikely to be fully fit, he can make his opponents play to his tune.

Marc Zwiebler, also of Mumbai Masters, has had an excellent season, reaching the semifinals of the German Open and the final of the Indonesia Open. Although he doesn't seem very physically intimidating, the left-handed Zwiebler is known to retrieve shuttles endlessly and wear his opponents down.

In Nguyen Tien Minh, Pune Pistons have a steady player. The Vietnamese is a veteran of many battles and will prove to be a difficult opponent.

The IBL will feature some lesser-known men's singles players like Tanongsak of Thailand, Chong Wei Feng of Malaysia and Wong Wing Ki of Hong Kong. All of them have had strong results in recent times, but they will need to be more consistent.

In women's singles, Tai Tzu Ying is the player to watch. With a rich variety of strokes, the Taipei teen has stormed into the top ten, and can well beat any player on her day. Her opponents, Saina Nehwal included, will be wary of her.

Tine Baun might have retired, but given the shortened format of matches in the IBL, is likely to prove an asset for Mumbai Masters. Baun's style of play – her long limbs give her enormous reach, and her broad shoulders power her aggressive game – has helped her to three All England titles and victories over China's best players. Baun is not an elegant player, and might seem almost awkward at times, but few can counter her attacking game when she's on song.

Another veteran who is still in the prime of her career is Juliane Schenk. The German plays a hustling brand of badminton, a physical style that's not attractive but very effective. Schenk's biggest asset is her fitness, both mentally and physically.

Among the young players making a mark are Carolina Marin of Spain, and Sapsiree Taerattanachai and Nichaon Jindapon of Thailand. Marin brings the left-hander's advantage to her game, and her deception is her biggest asset. It will be interesting to see how Banga Beats choose between her and Tai Tzu Ying for the lone women's singles spot.

There are several doubles stars worth watching too. Among them, the lanky Dane Carsten Mogensen, one half of the world No. 3 pair, is a study in badminton intelligence. The Olympic silver medallist will be partnering Akshay Dewalkar for Banga Beats and will be the pivot of his team.

The other half of the world No. 3 pair, Mathias Boe, was picked up by Awadhe Warriors and will be another player to watch out for.

The pair that is the most formidable is Koo Kien Keat/Tan Boon Heong of Delhi Smashers. Unlike other teams, the Rashid Sidek-coached side picked a regular pair for its men's doubles, and that will give the team a huge advantage. Koo patrols the front effectively, while Tan Boon Heong is among the hardest smashers in the world.

Another interesting pairing will be that of Joachim Fischer of Denmark with India's Ashwini Ponnappa. Fischer has partnered Christinna Pedersen with great success, having won the Olympic bronze last year, and he is always a treat to watch for his flamboyant style and peculiar shot-making.
