



Li-Ning BWF Thomas & Uber Cup Finals 2014: **Day 6 – Highlights**

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Session - 1

Japan broke one of Badminton's longest winning sequences, ending China's 10-year reign as Thomas Cup Champions in the Semi-finals today. China, which had won the last five editions since 2004 in an overall tally of nine Titles, cracked under the sustained pressure of an inspired Japanese Team in the Li-Ning BWF Thomas & Uber Cup Finals at Siri Fort Complex, New Delhi.

However, China's Women salvaged the day for them, beating Korea by the same score to enter the Uber Cup final for the 16th straight time.

Session – 2

The Li-Ning BWF Thomas & Uber Cup Finals moved to its climactic finish at the Siri Fort Complex, New Delhi, with Malaysia Men's Team outplaying Indonesia, while Japan's Women emulated their Men's Team in making the Title round.

Japan recovered from 0-2 down to beat India 3-2 in the Uber Cup Semi-final.

HIGHLIGHTS:

* Japan had a perfect day. Kenichi Tago (*below*) breached the Chinese wall in the opening match and from then on, China appeared to falter under increasing pressure. Just as he had done in his group match against Denmark's Jan O Jorgensen, Tago started guns blazing against Chen Long. World No.2 Chen was just not allowed to get into rhythm as Tago imposed himself from the start with his powerful attacking game. To make matters worse for Chen, his smashes weren't accurate as usual, while Tago's confidence rose with every rally. With the end in sight, Tago switched to a patient game without rushing the strokes and that paid him dividends as he closed out comfortably, 21-13 21-11. However, that was not to be. The pressure of his loss showed on Chai Biao and Hong Wei in the first doubles against Hiroyuki Endo and Kenichi Hayakawa. Although the Chinese built a handsome lead and had four game points, they started to appear unsure and leaden-footed with the Japanese closing in on them. Endo and Hayakawa won six straight points to take the first game.



As the second game drew to a close, Chai Biao's serve deserted him. He twice served into the net and was faulted once, shifting the momentum to the Japanese, which they grabbed gleefully to close out the match 22-20 21-19.

The second singles was a contest between youth and experience. Kento Momota , World Junior champion in 2012, showed maturity beyond his years as he outfoxed veteran Du Pengyu. Momota was astute throughout, creating the angles and frequently catching Du flat-footed with his trickery at the net. Momota had three opportunities to win the game, but his judgement at the baseline failed him and Du rode his luck to take the game.

Momota lost the spring in his step in the second, but he was able to keep the lead by virtue of his superior courtcraft that created openings at will. He controlled the net with his tight net shots, forcing Du to play defensively. Appropriately, the match was won on another net shot, giving Japan **(below)** the tie at 23-25 21-18 21-14.



* Meanwhile, in the Uber Cup, China faced little problems in reaching yet another final. Facing the might of Li Xuerui and Wang Shixian in singles, and Bao Yixin/Tang Jinhua (*below*) in doubles, the Korean challenge melted. Sung had her chances in the second game but Li shut her out 21-11 21-19; Bao/Tang were much too authoritative over Jang Ye Na/Kim So Young; Wang Shixian was stretched by Bae Yeon Ju but China took the tie with Wang winning 21-13 16-21 21-10.



* A Malaysian fairy tale played out at the venue as the pre-tournament underdogs packed off the strong contenders. World No.1 Lee Chong Wei (*below*) was expected to take the first point for Malaysia and he did, after shaking off stubborn resistance from Tommy Sugiarto in the first game, 21-19 21-13. The match that swung the tie decisively in Malaysia's favour was the doubles. World champions Mohammad Ahsan and Hendra Setiawan were overwhelming favourites against the scratch pair of Tan Boon Heong and Hoon Thien How but the Malaysians turned the match on its head with an astute tactical display.





Ahsan and Setiawan (*above*) struggled to control the proceedings with their jabs and placements as they usually do and even though they enjoyed a mid-match revival, they lagged behind in the third. They had one chance to take the match but they missed it, before Hoon and Tan converted their second match point, 21-19 8-21 23-21.

Setiawan struggled to explain the loss. "I don't know what went wrong. Malaysia went all out and we were under pressure in the third game."

Chong Wei Feng (*below*) had had an exceptional tournament with four successive wins and was one of the factors responsible for Malaysia's entry into the semi-finals. For Indonesia, all hopes were pinned on Dionysius Hayom Rumbaka. Unfortunately for Rumbaka, he could not reverse Chong's golden run of form.



Displaying silken touch and moving with feline grace, Chong Wei Feng outclassed Rumbaka from the start. Whatever the Indonesian did was countered and sent back with interest. In the second game Rumbaka staged a comeback from 11-16 to 16-all, but that's about as far as he got. Chong completed his fifth straight win, 21-10 21-17.

* India, powered by the resurgent Saina Nehwal and the combative PV Sindhu, went 2-0 up. While Nehwal had a straightforward victory over Minatsu Mitani (21-12 21-13), Sindhu's match against Sayaka Takahashi was an edge-of-the-seat thriller which mirrored her previous win against Indonesia's Bellaetrix Manuputty. The advantage swung one way and then the other with both digging deep in the face of adversity. Takahashi reversed a 3-8 deficit with nine straight points, but Sindhu continued to show the indefatigable spirit for which she is known. The Indian saved one match point at 19-20 and missed four of her own before finally converting her fifth: 19-21 21-18 26-24.

"It was almost the same kind of match as yesterday," Sindhu said. "The lead kept shifting between us. When I was down 8-12 in the third, my coach told me to fight hard, to not worry about the win, but to fight every point. She played very well; it could have been anybody's game."

The raucous home crowd sniffed a historic victory when Jwala Gutta (*below*) and Ashwini Ponnappa powered to a second-game win against Misaki Matsutomo/Ayaka Takahashi. The Japanese pair, however, had a wealth of experience in similar situations and exploited the chinks in the Indian combination to triumph 21-12 20-22 21-16.



* Japan (*below*) were favourites in the remaining two matches and they did not let the opportunity slip. Veteran Eriko Hirose was too crafty for Thulasi PC (21-14 21-15), while established pair Miyuki Maeda and Reika Kakiwa did not take too long to figure out the answers to India's scratch combination of Saina Nehwal and Sindhu PV, 21-14 21-11.


