



Vodafone IBL – 2013 Inaugural Season Team's Preview



The inaugural edition of the Vodafone Indian Badminton League kicks off on August 14. The \$1 million league is a joint initiative of the Badminton Association of India (BAI) and Sporty Solutions Pvt Ltd.

The league will be a team event with a city-based franchisee teams from Hyderabad, Lucknow, Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai and Pune fighting it out for the top honours.

The league format will be similar to Sudirman Cup, the prestigious world mixed team badminton championships. Each round will have five matches – men's and women's singles (two matches of men's singles in a round), and men's and mixed doubles.

Every team will play against each other once, and the top 4 will qualify for semi-finals to battle it out for a spot in the final at Mumbai on August 31.

Mumbai Masters:



The owners of the Mumbai Masters team, coming from cricket, movies and the industry, perfectly exemplify what the city is all about – cricket, movies and money. The Mumbaikers, who love their home teams, will be set to support the Mumbai Masters in their quest for glory in the IBL. What could be more ideal for the home fans than the Masters winning the IBL in the final, which will be held in the city on August 31.

Key facts:

Owners: Cricket legend Sunil Gavaskar, popular film star Nagarjuna and business tycoon V Chamundeshwarnath

Chief Coach: Tey Seu Bock - Former national coach of Malaysian badminton team, and current coach of [Lee Chong Wei](#)

Host Stadium: Sardar Vallabh Patel Stadium, NSCI

Icon Player: Lee Chong Wei – world number 1 men’s singles player

The owners of the Mumbai Masters team, coming from cricket, movies and the industry, perfectly exemplify what the city is all about – the cricket, movies and money. The Mumbaikers, who love their home teams, will be set to support the Mumbai Masters in their quest for glory in the IBL. What could be more ideal for the home fans than the masters winning the IBL in the final, which will be held in the city on August 31.

Team composition

The owners did a good job in the auctions in assembling a strong singles team. World number one Lee Chong Wei was picked up for an amount of \$135000, and German singles player Marc Zwiebler and current All [England](#) Open champion Tine Baun were picked to complete an impressive unit of singles players. Vladimir Ivanov was purchased to complete the overseas quota, and the Indians Pranav Chopra, Siki Reddy, Manu Attri, PC Thulasi, Sumeet Reddy and Rasika Raje complete the team.

Strengths: Men's and Women's Singles

Lee Chong Wei will be expected to win all his games without breaking much sweat, and in Marc Zwiebler, Mumbai have found an ideal second singles player for a bargain price of \$15000.

Tine Baun has retired from international sport after achieving her dream of winning the All England Open, and might be a bit rusty because of not playing actively. However, she has enough class and talent to see off her opponents and give the team some crucial victories in the women's singles.

Analysis of Men's and Mixed Doubles

Vladimir Ivanov could turn out to be an excellent buy for the team. Ranked number 14 in the doubles team rankings in the world, he is likely to play both men's doubles (with Manu Attri) and mixed doubles (with Siki Reddy) for Mumbai Masters. The two doubles matches in a tie for Masters might well be decided by the form of Ivanov.

Conclusion

Having a very strong team, the Mumbai Masters are surely one of the main contenders for the title crown. Lee Chong Wei and Ivanov will look to win their games in singles and doubles respectively, and Zwiebler and Baun will be expected to pitch in with some important wins too. If the team plays to its potential potential, it shouldn't face too much problem reaching the knockout stages or even the final, which will be played at its home-ground.

Pune Pistons:



Pune is considered to be the birthplace of badminton. In fact for long, badminton was referred to as the “Poona Game”. As per some accounts, the British soldiers, who used to play the sport in Pune, took the game back with them on their return to Gloucestershire County. The Duke of Beaufort from the town of badminton actively promoted the game, and the sport was therefore called “Badminton” as a salute to his contribution. The city of Pune has produced India’s first badminton icon Nandu Natekar, who was the first Indian to win an international tournament outside the country.

Key facts:

Owners: Burman family – Owners of the Dabur group. Burman family also owns a stake in the [Kings XI Punjab IPL](#) team and [Mumbai Magicians](#) team in the [Hockey India League](#)

Chief Coach: Nikhil Kanetkar – Represented India in the 2004 Olympics

Host Stadium: Shri Shiv Chhatrapati Sports Complex, Badminton Hall, Balewadi

Icon Player: [Ashwini Ponnappa](#) – Bronze medallist in women’s doubles at 2011 BWF World Championship; gold medallist in women’s doubles in 2010 Commonwealth Games

Team Composition

The owners did a good job in the auction and have compiled a well balanced team. Indian star Ashwini Ponnappa is the icon player in the team, which also has top women's singles player Juliane Schenk, Vietnamese men single's star Tien Minh Nguyen, seasoned doubles players Joachim Fischer and Wee Kiong Tan. Apart from Ponnappa, the Indian contingent also comprises of Arun Vishnu, Anup Sridhar, Saurabh Verma, Rupesh Kumar and Sanave Thomas.

Strengths: Men's and Women's Singles, Mixed Doubles

World number seven Tien Minh Nguyen has been in top form recently and will be a potent force for all other teams to deal with. Saurabh Verma is likely to be the other men's singles player, and he might have to bring out some inspired performances to win his matches.

In the women's singles department, Juliane Schenk looks set to have a good tournament. Joachim Fischer is likely to partner Ashwini Ponnappa in mixed doubles, and the Indo-Danish pair will use all their experience to do well.

Analysis of Men's Doubles

Wee Kiong Tan, who is world number 10 in men's doubles, is likely to be partnered by one among Rupesh Kumar, Sanave Thomas and Arun Vishnu. It'll be imperative for the Indian player who plays in men's doubles to complement the Malaysian well in the games, if they are to win against some tough competition from other teams.

Conclusion

The star players (Nguyen, Schenk, Fischer/Ponnappa) will be expected to win their matches. The second men's singles (Verma) is a bit of a concern, while the coach will look to get the men's doubles combination right. The team looks well balanced and should be able to make it to semi-finals, barring any major hiccups.

Krrish Delhi Smashers



Boasting of a rich legacy in the sport, Delhi's badminton courts have been the place where many Indian internationals have honed their skills. The city is home to Dinesh Khanna, Asian Games gold medallist, Madhumita Bisht, who has won bronze at the Asiad, and several other players.

Key facts:

Owners: Krrish Group – Business conglomerate with presence in field of distillery, breweries, construction and real estate sectors.

Chief Coach: Rashid Sidek - Former world number 1 Malaysian player

Host Stadium: DDA Badminton & Squash Stadium – Siri Fort

Icon Player: [Jwala Gutta](#) – Bronze medallist in women's doubles at 2011 BWF World Championship; Gold medallist in women's doubles in 2010 Commonwealth Games

Team Composition

After opting to sign Jwala Gutta as their icon player, the Smashers shrewdly added V Diju (Gutta's former mixed doubles partner) to the team as well. Wing Ki Wong was signed to be the team's main men's singles player, but an injury meant he had to withdraw and the team replaced him with Malaysian Daren Liew. Sai Praneeth is likely to be the other men's singles representative, while young Thai Nichaon Jindapon will play the women's singles. The Malaysian duo of Tan Boon Heong and Koo Kien Keat will form the men's doubles team. The Indian contingent of Arundhati Panthawane, HS Prannoy and Prajakta Sawant complete the team.

Strengths: Men's and Mixed Doubles

The world number 2 pair of Heong and Keat is one of the strongest men's doubles teams in the competition, and with them being a regular pair, they will know each other's game and should complement each other very well.

The Diju-Gutta partnership should do well in mixed doubles, with the duo having played together with reasonable success before.

Analysis of Men's and Women's Singles

The team will miss Wing Ki Wong, though Liew is a good replacement signing. The other men's singles player, Sai Praneeth, has recorded some victories over top players, and will back himself to beat them again in the tournament.

Thai Jindapon might be seen as a weak link in the team, though she's been doing well off and is currently enjoying her highest ever world ranking.

Conclusion

Wing Ki Wong's absence will surely be felt and might impact the team's quest for a spot in the knockout stage. A lot now depends on the doubles teams (both men and mixed), as they will need to win almost all their matches for the team to progress to the semi-finals.

The team is still well balanced and capable of beating anyone on their day. An inspired show from the players will take them to the later stages of the IBL.

Hyderabad Hotshots:



Key facts:

Owners: PVP Group - Multi-business house based in Hyderabad, having interests in realty, media and entertainment. IBL is PVP Group's first venture into sports.

Chief Coach: Rajendra Kumar – Coach at the Gopichand Academy

Host Stadium: Gachibowli Indoor Stadium

Icon Player: [Saina Nehwal](#) – World number 4 in women's singles and 2012 Olympics bronze medallist

Team Composition

The team is an excellent mix of youth and experience, and will begin the tournament as one of the favourites. Saina Nehwal and Taufik Hidayat need no introduction, and rising Indian star [Ajay Jayaram](#) will be a more than handy understudy to Hidayat.

Malaysians V Shem Goh and Khim Wah Lim are a regular mens' doubles team, and can be expected to do well. Promising Indian players Tarun Kona and Pradnya Gadre will make the mixed doubles team.

Thai player Tanongsak and Indians Subhankar Dey and Kanthi Visalakshi complete the team's line-up.

Strengths: Women's Singles and Men's Doubles

Saina Nehwal is the highest ranked women's singles player in the event, and would be expected to win all her games. She'll have tricky games against Tai Tzu Ying of Banga Beats and PV Sindhu of Awadhe Warriors, but the Hyderabad team will back their icon player to come out winner in both these games.

The duo of V Shem Goh and Khim Wah are currently ranked world number 17 in men's doubles, and will have the advantage of being a regular team.

Analysis of Men's Singles and Mixed Doubles

The experience Taufik Hidayat, who retired recently, is reported to be working hard on maintaining his fitness levels for the IBL. He is likely to be the team's first choice singles player. One between Ajay Jayaram and Tanongsak is likely to be selected for the second singles.

Hotshots will be best served if Hidayat plays the first men's singles and wins it, and Jayaram or Tanongsak consolidate on that by winning their game.

In Tarun Kona and Pradnya Gadre, the team has a decent mixed doubles team. While Pradnya is a relative newcomer on the international circuit, Tarun has tasted some success in his pairing in mixed doubles with [Ashwini Ponnappa](#). It'll be interesting to see how the two young Indians fare as a team in the IBL.

Conclusion

Hyderabad Hotshots have a strong and formidable team, which is one of the pre-tournament favourites. If the star players (Nehwal, Hidayat, men's doubles team) play to their potential, then the Hotshots stand a good chance of having a successful event.

Awadhe Warriors:



Key facts:

Owners: Sahara India Pariwar – A diversified business house that has interests in finance, infrastructure & housing, media & entertainment, and many other domains. Sahara is a major promoter of sports in the country, being main sponsor of Indian cricket team and Indian hockey team. They own the Pune Warriors team in the [IPL](#) and also have a stake in Force India F1.

Chief Coach: Muhammad Hafiz Hashim - Former Olympian and All [England](#) Open champion

Host Stadium: Babu Banarsi Das UP Badminton Academy (BBD UPBA)

Icon Player: PV Sindhu – Bronze medallist at the 2013 BWF World Championships

Lucknow has been a traditional centre for nurturing Badminton talent. The team will look to seek inspiration from one of India's all-time greats, the late Syed Modi. Modi honed his badminton skills at Lucknow, and went to win gold medal in men's singles at the 1982 Commonwealth Games.

Team Composition

Fresh from her bronze medal performance at the World Championships, PV Sindhu will lead the team as its icon player, representing the team in women's singles. Malaysian Weng Fei Chong (world number 15) and Indians Gurusai Dutt and [K Srikanth](#) will be vying to represent the team in the two men's singles matches.

The men's doubles team looks formidable in the team of Markis Kido and Mathias Boe. Representing the team in the mixed doubles will be the team of Nandagopal and K Maneesha. The duo were winners at the Maldives International.

Thai Taerattanachai and Indian youngster Ruthvika Shivani will provide good alternate/backup options to the team.

Strengths: Women's Singles and Men's Doubles

PV Sindhu will look to continue her excellent form in the tournament; and the Awadhe Warriors will expect solid performances from the teenage sensation.

The team's strength is in its men's doubles team. Markis Kido is world number 4 in the format, and the recent signing of former world number 1 Mathias Boe makes the team a deadly one.

Analysis of Men's Singles and Mixed Doubles

In the men's singles department, the team has Weng Fei Chong, Gurusai Dutt and Srikanth. While none of them is a world beater, each is an efficient player who can be expected to give his best if selected to play. Coach Hashim will have to decide which two out of the three plays in the men's singles. Not having a top men's singles player might backfire for the Lucknow team as many other teams boast big names in the format.

The team of Nandagopal and Maneesha will have advantage of having played together before in the mixed doubles format. Their victory at Maldives will be a boost to their confidence and they will be keen to put up a good show in the IBL.

Conclusion

Though the Awadhe Warriors can be only considered as dark horses in the tournament, they are very capable of springing up a surprise or two. Chances of reaching the semifinal stage are low, but an inspired show could lift the team into the knockouts.

Banga Beats:



Key facts:

Owners: BOP Group - Better Option Propmart Pvt. Ltd or BOP Group are India's leading real estate consultants with presence across India, Dubai and Singapore

Chief Coach: Vimal Kumar - Former Olympian & National Chief Coach

Host Stadium: Kanteerva Indoor Stadium

Icon Player: [Parupalli Kashyap](#) – India's top-ranked men's singles player, winner of 2012 [Indian GP](#)

Home to Prakash Padukone, Bangalore has been a hub for nurturing talent at the legendary player's Badminton Academy. Some of the finest Indian players have emerged from the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy, including former All-England champion and current India coach P Gopichand, Aparna Popat and current players like Ajay Jayaram.

Team Composition

With a strong and balanced line-up, Banga Beats is a strong contender at the inaugural IBL. The franchisee boasts of two of the finest men's singles players in Parupalli Kashyap and world number 6 Hu Yun of Hong Kong, upcoming women's singles star Tai Tzu Ying, Spanish player Carolina Marin, and former world number 1 in men's doubles Carsten Mogensen.

There is also some upcoming home talent in the team in the form of Aparna Balan, Arvind Bhatt, Akshay Dewalkar, Aditya Prakash, J Meghana and Daniel Farid.

Strengths: Men's Singles and Doubles

The men's singles will be played by Kashyap and Hu Yun, and Banga Beats will expect both of them to win all their matches, including those against quality opponents.

In Mogensen, the team has one of the best men's doubles players in the world at the moment. He is likely to be paired with Akshay Dewalkar in the team's matches, and it'll be interesting how the Indo-Danish combo fares in the competition.

Analysis of Women's Singles and Mixed Doubles

Coach Vimal Kumar will have to choose between Tai Tzu Ying and Carolina Marin to represent the team in the women's singles. Bangalore girl Aparna Balan is expected to play in the mixed doubles games, most probably alongside Mogensen.

Conclusion

The team looks very strong on paper, and its fortunes in the competition will depend largely on the performances in the men's singles and doubles matches. A good show from the women and mixed doubles will be a bonus for the team. If the team plays to its potential, it should be in the reckoning for a spot in the semi-finals.
