

Syed Fazaluddin and Sahiba Chadha emerge the champions -1993

Syed Fazaluddin had been making the waves, but it was the Shriram Open that helped him establish his tennis career.

The elder son of Dronacharya awardee football coach Syed Naeemuddin had failed to draw the attention of Ramanathan Krishnan and Sumant Mishra during the trials to select trainees for the AITA Academy in the Capital. He had lost to Lavnish Chatrath in the national junior championship final on grass in Lucknow.

It was a remarkable performance by the energetic Fazal as he came through the qualifying rounds and beat a strong field that had quality players like K. G. Ramesh, S. Narendra Nath, Anand Sukumar, Manoj Kumar and Nitin Kirtane apart from several talented youngsters.

A stint with coach Akhtar Ali had helped Fazal sharpen his game after he had been kept out of the fray in the Limca junior tournament because of examinations. He had to overcome a back injury that had stopped him from picking up a tennis racquet for two months earlier.

In beating Vasudeva Reddy, a trainee of the AITA Academy, 6-0 in the second and final set, Fazal emphasised his immense potential. It was not a surprise that in later years, he went on to represent the country in Davis Cup. In a thriller of a final, Fazal held his nerves when it mattered to emerge a worthy winner.

Sahiba Chadha, the only girl to have had training at the BAT Centre in Chennai, a stable that had tuned players like Leander Paes, Asif Ismail, Gaurav Natekar and Rohit Rajpal, played hard enough to win the women's title. She, however, could not match Jahnvi Parekh in the under-18 girls final. In fact, the women's and junior fields were almost similar.

Rushmi Chakravarthi and Sai Jayalakshmy won the women's doubles title. In the years ahead, they were to make a strong bond that would see them win numerous international doubles titles.

Vishaal Uppal won the under-18 title with a quality fare. He had his chances against Manoj Kumar in the men's event, but was unable to drive home the advantage in the climax. He did mature into a quality player, and went on to represent the country in Davis Cup and had a memorable pairing with Leander Paes in the doubles rubber against the Koreans in Delhi a few years later.

Intikhab Ali was able to master the under-16 boys field, while the Chennai left-hander Aparna Ravi was impressive in beating local girl Swati Rao in three sets in the final. Aparna was to reach the women's singles semifinals the following year on grass in the national championship in Chandigarh, an event that saw Mahesh Bhupathi win his maiden national title.

A clutch of kids, the eventual champion Y. Sandeep, Ajay Ramaswami, Shriranga Sudhakar and Jay Patel delighted with their game in the under-14 section to project a bright future. Sandeep had the strength of concentration to outplay Ajay Ramaswami in the final. The trainee of AITA Academy indeed made his coach T. Chandrasekaran proud.

Equally, Uzma Khan gave a hint of what she was capable of, by winning the under-14 title with ease. She got a walkover from Aparna in the semifinals, but was too good for Hetal Parekh in the final. Hetal was perhaps exhausted after her semifinal against Nehal Chopra that she won in the third set tie-break.

The results (finals):

Men: Syed Fazaluddin bt S. Narendra Nath 7-6 (6), 4-6, 7-6 (3); **Doubles:** Nandan Bal and Rohit Rajpal bt K. G. Ramesh and S. Narendra Nath 6-4, 6-4.

Women: Sahiba Chadha bt Shalini Thakur 7-5, 7-6 (4); **Doubles:** Rushmi Chakravarthi and Sai Jayalakshmy bt Sohini Kumari and Shalini Thakur 6-3, 7-6 (1).

Under-18 boys: Vishaal Uppal bt Rajesh Vohra 7-6(8), 7-5.

Under-18 girls: Jahnavi Parekh bt Sahiba Chadha 6-3, 6-3.

Under-16 boys: Initkhab Ali bt Rohan Malhotra 7-6(4), 7-5.

Under-16 girls: Aparna Ravi bt Swati Rao 6-3, 3-6, 6-4.

Under-14 boys: Y. Sandeep bt Ajay Ramaswami 6-2, 6-3.

Under-14 girls: Uzma Khan bt Hetal Parekh 6-2, 6-1.