

Nitin Kirtane and Archana Venkataraman emphasise their strong will - 1995

Nitin Kirtane beat the fourth member of the Indian Davis Cup squad, Asif Ismail, in a tough final to emphasise that he was the player for the future.

The 21-year-old Nitin used the backhand slice with great effect to tease and torment Asif who likes the ball to bounce nicely and come on to this racquet for forceful strokeplay. The Pune left-hander, a trainee of Nandan Bal at the Batra Centre, Nitin showed that it was possible to make strokes look like potent weapons if one had the will to fight.

It was a creditable fare, considering that it was a quality field with players like Vikrant Chadha, Saurav Panja, Amandeep Singh, Salil Seshadri, Jaideep Shetty, Vasudeva Reddy and Vishaal Uppal in the fray. K. G. Ramesh and Narendra Nath were also present and progressed a lot farther than the youngsters did, emphasising that there was no match for experience against misguided youth.

The presence of two players of repute, Janaki Krishnamoorthy, the national hard court champion, and fluent-stroking Arati Ponnappa did not stop the gutsy Archana Venkataraman from bagging the women's title.

A clutch of other talented players like Sai Jayalakshmy, Rushmi Chakravarthi, Shuba Srinivasan, Hrushida Kamthe, Uzma Khan and Sadiya Pathan were unable to assert themselves the way Archana eventually did.

However, Uzma Khan had the consolation of winning the junior title at the expense of Archana whom she beat 6-0 in the third set. Archana was tired after the women's final, though she had conceded a mere three games in that, to Rashmi Khanna. Uzma also captured the under-16 title without much fuss.

Archana finished runner-up in the women's doubles along with her elder sister Arthi Venkataraman, against Sai and Janaki.

The bespectacled P. Anujapathi stopped Sheethal Goutham in the under-14 final, and revealed remarkable reserves of fighting spirit. She hit the ball with a flourish and enjoyed her game to the hilt, running down everything. The Madras girl, a student of Church Park Convent, recovered from being close to defeat at 0-6, 2-5 to record a memorable triumph.

DHAITA trainees Amandeep Singh and Rohan Wadehra clashed in the under-18 boys final and the former prevailed with his all-round energetic game and higher intensity of concentration. These two talented players were to later move to the US for education and career, leaving tennis far behind in their priority list.

Harsh Mankad won the under-16 title while Manoj Mahadevan won the honour in the under-14 event. Both were a cut above the rest and promised to shoulder the responsibility of carrying the country's hopes.

It was a very satisfactory experience for the organisers to have conducted events in all the age groups, catering to more than 1000 players within a week. The total purse of nearly ten lakh rupees of prize money and scholarship funds was a huge attraction for Indian tennis.

The men's and women's winners were presented Rs.40,000 and Rs.27,000 respectively. It was a rich purse as money had much better value then.

The idea was mooted to expand the event to two weeks so that the players could do justice to their talent in a more leisure fashion, rather run through the grind, that was physically taxing and took the freshness away from the mind.

The results (finals):

Men: Nitin Kirtane bt Asif Ismail 7-6 (6), 7-5; **Doubles:** Asif Ismail and Sandeep Kirtane bt Nitin Kirtane and Saurav Panja 6-4, 5-7, 6-4.

Women: Archana Venkataraman bt Rashmi Khanna 6-1, 6-2; **Doubles:** Sai Jayalakshmy and Janaki Krishnamoorthy bt Archana Venkataraman and Arthi Venkataraman 6-4, 7-6 (1).

Under-18 boys: Amandeep Singh bt Rohan Wadehra 6-3, 6-4; **Doubles:** Shailesh Dhoble and Amod Wakalkar bt Ajay Ramaswami and Shriranga Sudhakar 6-4, 6-4.

Under-18 girls: Uzma khan bt Archana Venkataraman 5-7, 6-4, 6-0; **Doubles:** Ritu Sethi and Mabel Abraham bt Nehal Chopra and Aparna Srinivasan 5-7, 6-4, 6-1.

Under-16 boys: Harsh Mankad bt Jay Patel 6-4, 6-3.

Under-16 girls: Uzma Khan bt Aparna Srinivasan 6-2, 6-1.

Under-14 boys: Manoj Mahadevan bt Nilesh Saldanha 6-4, 6-2.

Under 14 girls: P. Anujapathi bt Sheethal Goutham 0-6, 7-5, 6-3.