

Vinod Sridhar and Isha Lakhani assert the supremacy of left-handers - 2002

It was a season of the left-handers, as Vinod Sridhar, Isha Lakhani and R. Arun Prakash won the men's, women's and the junior titles. In fact, it was a triple crown for the 17-year-old Mumbai girl Isha, as she won the women's singles and doubles apart from the under-18 girls singles title.

Vinod had to tackle a tough field. He did so in style. The Chennai lad beat defending champion Vijay Kannan in the quarterfinals in straight sets, though it had to be conceded that the latter was not at his best as he was returning from a wrist injury. Accounted for the national junior champion, Somdev Dev Varman in the semifinals. He was adequately prepared for the final against the big-serving Mustafa Ghouse and cruised home in four sets after the first two sets had been intensely contested.

Rohan Bopanna, the runner-up of the previous year had done very well in the season including a final appearance in the Asian Championship in Tashkent. A victory there would have fetched him a wild card for the Australian Open. He has done very well to jump into the big league despite losing to the defensive tactics of Vijay Kannan in the last edition. Having learnt his lessons, Bopanna opted to stay focused in the international league.

Coming back to the current edition, the powerful serve and volley game of Mustafa Ghouse could not match the strong determination of Vinod Sridhar. He had done well to win the doubles bronze medal in the Busan Asian Games with Vishaal Uppal, but has not generally played with conviction in singles to match his potential. He, of course, had won the national grasscourt title in Kolkata.

Isha impressed though she conquered a field that did not have Rushmi Chakravarthi, Sai Jayalakshmy and Sania Mirza. The Mumbai lass came through with flying colours despite being unseeded. She beat a string of good players like Priyanka Parekh, eighth seed

Archana Venkataraman, the second seed Radhika Tulpule, the fourth seed Ankita Bhambri and the third seed Sonal Phadke in that order.

A small frame notwithstanding, Isha emphasised that she had the heart of a champion. The top seed Sheethal Goutham lost early to her doubles partner Shruti Dhawan.

In the junior event, Lata Assudani took a set off Isha in the semifinals, but the latter bounced back so well that she won 12 of the next 15 games. There was no match for Isha otherwise including the final against Sasha Abraham.

Arun Prakash Rajagopalan, a trainee of the Krishnan Tennis Centre from Chennai, beat a competitive field that had players like Amanjot Singh, Chatwinder Singh, Tushar Liberhan, Somdev Dev Varman and Nihal Advani. Supported by the Tamil Nadu Academy for Tennis Excellence (TATE), Arun played a good serve and volley game to beat the grinders from the backcourt.

A surprising point was the former national champion Sunil Kumar conceding his match without so much as a medical advice in the third set against Kamala Kannan in the second round. Sunil returned to play the doubles an hour later and that match went into three sets.

Coimbatore's Madura Ranganathan made a mark winning both the girls under-16 and under-14 titles while Chandigarh boy Sanam Singh won the under-14 title but lost the under-16 final in three sets to Divij Sharan.

The results (finals):

Men: Vinod Sridhar bt Mustafa Ghouse 7-6 (4), 3-6, 6-1, 6-1; **Doubles:** Nitin Kirtane and Saurav Panja bt Rohan Gajjar and Ajay Ramaswamy 7-6 (4), 4-6, 6-4.

Women: Isha Lakhani bt Sonal Phadke 6-3, 7-6 (2); **Doubles:** Isha Lakhani and Sonal Phadke bt Ankita Bhambri and Radhika Tulpule 1-6, 6-4, 6-4.

Mixed doubles: Shruti Dhawan and Ajay Ramaswamy bt Radhika Tulpule and Sandeep

Kirtane 7-5, 3-6, 6-3.

Under-18 boys: R. Arun Prakash bt Amanjot Singh 6-2, 76 (5); **Doubles:** Divij Sharan and Tushar Liberhan bt Amanjot Singh and Saurabh Singh 7-6 (6), 6-3.

Under-18 girls: Isha Lakhani bt Sasha Abraham 6-1, 6-3; **Doubles:** Ragini Vimal and Priyanka Parekh bt Sharanya Pattabi and Nivedita Venkatesh 6-1, 6-4.

Under-16 boys: Divij Sharan bt Sanam Singh 2-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Under-16 girls: Madura Ranganathan bt Oormila Ram 6-4, 6-1.

Under-14 boys: Sanam Singh bt R. K.Praveen 7-6 (2), 6-2.

Under-14 girls: Madura Ranganathan bt G. K. Shweta 6-3, 6-4.