

Sunil Kumar and Isha Lakhani win it once again to revive their career - 2005

Sunil Kumar and Isha Lakhani had been the hero and heroine of the DSCL National tennis championship before, and they were happy to don the role once again, to possibly re-launch their career on a more sound footing.

The 22-year-old Chandigarh lad, Sunil had won the national men's title in 1999, but has not been able to push his career as much as he should have despite being taken under his wings by our Davis Cup hero, multiple Grand Slam champion and Olympic bronze medallist Leander Paes.

Despite being stretched to three sets by wild card Purav Raja in the first round, and despite being tired after a successful stint in the four-week ITF Satellite circuit prior to the championship, Sunil played robust tennis to collect the winner's purse of Rs.100,000. More than that he regained our confidence that his career would get back on the rails once again.

Ashutosh Singh had not won a round in the singles main draw in the last five editions that he had played but the 23-year-old Delhi boy, son of coach Balram Singh, made the final, as he rode on a favourable draw in beating three qualifiers in his first three rounds. In the semifinals, he downed the former national champion Vijay Kannan with an attacking all-round game. In the best of five sets final, Ashutosh took the third set, but he never threatened the eventual champion much.

The former champion Nitin Kirtane was getting ready to return to his favourite tournament, but a car accident that broke his non-playing right hand shattered his plans. Nitin wrote to say that he would fight his way back to the tennis courts once again, and that his career should not be written off as yet. Right spirit ! In Indian women's tennis, Isha Lakhani is perhaps the most complete player after Sania Mirza. The short-built but stout-hearted Mumbai girl had beaten Sania in a \$25,000 ITF

women's tournament in Mumbai, but has struggled to put together a successful career because of a series of injuries.

The high quality of tennis that Isha played in the national championship, in which she had won a double crown in 2002, showed that she would be a force to reckon in the months to come. It was a double crown for the 20-year-old Isha this time as she won the doubles as well with Sonal Phadke.

The petite Sonal finished runner-up for the third time, and managed to make a fight of it after trailing 3-5 in the second set. She has been admirably at it and came through a series of tough matches. Her time will come some day.

In the junior events, qualifier Arnav Jain stole the hearts with his all-round game. A trainee of coach Enrico Piperno at the CCI in Mumbai, the 16-year-old Arnav did not drop a set in winning 11 matches including five in the qualifying event. The boy dropped only seven of 52 games in the qualifying tournament and was authoritative in the main draw as well, except for being taken to the tie-break in the second set by the top-seeded Sumit Prakash Gupta in the semifinals.

Poojashree Venkatesh was quite efficient in winning the under-18 and under-16 girls titles. In stopping national junior champion G. K. Shweta in three sets of the under-18 final, the 15-year-old Poojashree showed that she has come of age. She had won the under-14 title last year. The tall Bangalore girl who trains at the Nagaraj Centre in Mysore had little challenge in winning the under-16 title. She was competing in the under-16 event just to ensure that she made the Indian junior Fed Cup team.

G. P. Prajnesh, a trainee of coach M. Balachandran at the KSLTA in Bangalore was a delight to watch with his intensity of approach and fluency of strokeplay in the under-16 section. He beat players of all sizes and different styles with a touch of assurance to emphasise his potential, which he had already established with good performances in the ITF junior circuit.

The absence of the Bhambri sisters, who were successfully competing in \$25,000 ITF women's tournaments in Nigeria, was compensated by the presence of the Bhambri clan in the sub-junior events.

Yuki Bhambri was superb with his reading of the game and sound execution. The frail boy dominated the field in a draw of 64 and dropped only 20 games in six matches to clinch the honour. He won the doubles title also with his cousin Prateek Bhambri.

Rashmi Teltumbe, the 13-year-old trainee of Kedar Tembe in Mumbai, was seeded second and said that she had come to win the title. She did so after bouncing back from being 0-6 down in the final against the talented left-hander Soniya Dayal who had put out the top-seeded Perna Bhambri in the semifinals.

The results (finals):

Men: Sunil Kumar bt Ashutosh Singh 6-4, 6-4, 3-6, 6-3; **Doubles:** Divij Sharan and Vivek Shokeen bt Kamala Kannan and Ashutosh Singh 6-4, 6-1.

Women: Isha Lakhani bt Sonal Phadke 6-1, 7-6 (7); **Doubles:** Isha Lakhani and Sonal Phadke bt Sheethal Goutham and Geeta Manohar 6-1, 6-2.

Under-18 boys: Arnav Jain bt Kinshuk Sharma 6-2, 6-3; **Doubles:** Sumit Prakash Gupta and M. Saketh Sai Myneni bt A. S. Suresh Krishna and P. C. Vignesh 3-6, 6-1, 6-0.

Under-18 girls: Poojashree Venkatesh bt G. K. Shweta 6-2, 6-7 (5), 6-4; **Doubles:** Parija Maloo and Shweta Kumari Solanki bt Sampada Kanade and Anushree Thamanna 6-2, 6-3.

Under-16 boys: G. P. Prajnesh bt Sriram Balaji 6-3, 6-0; **Doubles:** G. P. Prajnesh and Akash Wagh bt Tariq Jacob and Navaneetha Kannan 7-5, 6-1.

Under-16 girls: Poojashree Venkatesh bt Parija Maloo 6-2, 6-0; **Doubles:** Parija Maloo and Poojashree Venkatesh bt Shalini Sahoo and Vishaka Sheoran 6-1, 1-6, 6-3.

Under-14 boys: Yuki Bhambri bt Mansingh Athare 6-4, 6-3; **Doubles:** Yuki Bhambri and Prateek Bhambri bt Ronak Manuja and Mandeep Singh Gill 6-0, 7-6 (5).

Under-14 girls: Rashmi Teltumbe bt Soniya Dayal 0-6, 6-4, 6-2; **Doubles:** Gopika Kapoor and Y. P. Aishwarya bt Prerna Bhambri and Rashmi Teltumbe 7-6 (3), 6-4.