

Purav Raja wins a maiden double crown, Isha Lakhani does it for the third time - 2006

He was not the favourite, but Purav Raja proved that he was the best as he fought his way to the title.

"I just refused to lose", said the 20-year-old Mumbai lad, after taming Vishnu Vardhan in a battle of wits that spanned three hours and 54 minutes. Purav won the dramatic contest 1-6, 7-6(3), 6-3, 6-3.

Having won the doubles title the previous day with his coach and partner Sandeep Kirtane, Purav had tasted success and was thirsting for more. He had stopped the talented Sanam Singh, by bouncing back from 1-4 in the decider in the semifinals, and thus had the confidence to match anyone.

What was impressive about Purav was his ability to stay mobile till the end and think on his feet, while Vishnu seemed to be weighed down by expectations that he had perhaps heaped on himself.

Vishnu's big serves failed to fire and he paid for losing serve early in the second, third and fourth sets. He had put up a flawless game till the final, pulling off a series of impressive matches, particularly the one against Ashutosh Singh in the semifinals, but at the crunch he just could not put it all together.

The contrast between the two was the level of self-belief. Purav was brimming with it and Vishnu, a strapping young man with a lot of energy and intense focus, lacked the conviction in his own abilities.

Purav had given a glimpse of his abilities by taking the first set against Sanam after being 2-5 down in the semifinals that set the tempo for his eventual entry into the final. He had the distinct ability to fight his way back into a match.

Equally, the top-seeded Isha Lakhani was quite determined and bounced back from an indifferent start to outplay the talented Sandhya Nagaraj in three sets in the women's final. She had earlier won the doubles title with her.

The diminutive left-hander from Mumbai, Isha has a stout heart and can beat anyone on her day, if she puts her mind on the job. She is the last Indian player to have beaten Sania Mirza, but a string of injuries has prevented Isha from doing justice to her potential in the international arena.

"It is important to win the national title. I am glad to have done it again", said Isha who had won the women's singles and doubles titles in 2002 and 2005 as well.

Sriram Balaji was the best in the junior section, but started awfully against Fariz Mohammad in the under-18 final, failing to win a game in the first set. Fariz had knocked out the defending champion Arnav Jain easily in the semifinals and looked to have continued from there. However, the wiry lad from Chennai, Balaji regrouped his game quickly and overwhelmed the opponent eventually in the third set, paying back with the same coin.

Kyra Shroff celebrated her 14th birthday by winning the girls under-18 title, as she beat her doubles partner Kelsey Sundaram in straight sets after being 2-5 in the first set.

"I didn't expect to win the under-18 title. I need to be more aggressive", said Kyra, revealing her better understanding of the demands of the game.

Kyra had shown her fighting abilities by bouncing back from 5-7, 2-5 to beat the smooth-stroking Parija Maloo in a tough semifinal that lasted three hours and 25 minutes. In fact, Kyra had to ward off further danger at 1-3 in the decider.

Rashmi Teltumbe was the star in the second week as she won the under-16 and under-14 titles. The Mumbai girl beat Nova Patel of Gujarat in successive finals in contrasting styles.

A trainee of Kedar Tembe, Rashmi recovered from the sight of defeat at 2-5 in the second set to beat Nova 6-7(2), 7-6(4), 6-3 in two hours and 25 minutes for the under-16 title.

Nova was so good despite a bout of Malaria. However, she was not left with any energy for the under-14 final later in the day.

“My aim was to win both the titles and am glad to have accomplished that. I am proud to have done this without much preparation as I was busy with the school examinations before this tournament”, said Rashmi.

Yuki Bhambri continued to assert his class as he made the under-16 final against Vijayant Malik and defended the under-14 title. The lanky Chandigarh lad, Vijayant started well and retained the momentum for a straight forward win against Yuki, who recovered from 0-5 in the first set to make a fight of it, but could not push his way much, purely for lack of physical energy. Maybe, Yuki will be better prepared next year !

The results (finals):

Men: Purav Raja bt Vishnu Vardhan 1-6, 7-6(3), 6-3, 6-3; **Doubles:** Purav Raja and Sandeep Kirtane bt Saurav Sukul and Yannick Nelord 6-0, 7-6 (6).

Women: Isha Lakhani bt Sandhya Nagaraj 3-6, 6-3, 6-3; **Doubles:** Isha Lakhani and Sandhya Nagaraj bt Poojashree Venkatesh and Parija Maloo 6-3, 6-4.

Under-18 boys: Sriram Balaji bt Fariz Mohammad 0-6, 6-4, 6-0; **Doubles:** Prajnesh Gunneswaran and Akash Gujarathi bt Sumit Prakash Gupta and Kinshuk Sharma 6-3, 7-6 (5).

Under-18 girls: Kyra Shroff bt Kelsey Sundaram 7-5, 6-4; **Doubles:** Kyra Shroff and Kelsey Sundaram bt Shalini Sahoo and Vishaka Sheoran 6-4, 2-6, 6-3.

Under-16 boys: Vijayant Malik bt Yuki Bhambri 6-3, 6-3; **Doubles:** Karunuday Singh and Abhijeet Tiwari bt Vijayant Malik and Shiva Sangwan 6-7 (9), 6-4, 10-4.

Under-16 girls: Rashmi Teltumbe bt Nova Patel 6-7 (2), 7-6 (4), 6-3; **Doubles:** Prachi Nadkarni and Tanvi Shah bt Ratnika Batra and Garima Vatwani 6-2, 6-4.

Under-14 boys: Yuki Bhambri bt Sumeet Shinde 6-3, 6-3; **Doubles:** S. Siddharth and Aniket Wakankar bt Shahbaaz Khan and Vishwesh Sinha 6-7 (2), 6-1, 10-5.

Under-14 girls: Rashmi Teltumbe bt Nova Patel 6-4, 6-2; **Doubles:** Divija Mandava and Rishika Sunkara bt Anushka Bhargav and Nikkie Gargi 6-3, 7-5.