



The First Bangkok Open Pickleball Tournament

BY SUNIL VALAVALKAR

The Bangkok Open Pickleball Tournament took place at the Santisuk English School on February 19 and involved an international cast including players from Thailand, India, the U.S., Australia, Vietnam and several other Asian countries.

Although it wasn't an IFP-sanctioned tournament, the event reflected a high standard of organization and competition.

It all started in December 2016, when Steve Cable sent an email to me inviting Indian players to join the tournament.

We didn't expect a huge response, but a week before the sign-up deadline, there were over 30 requests from players all across India. The picklers responded out of pure passion, willing to cover all travel costs on their own. In the end, there were five players from state of Maharashtra, nine from Rajasthan, four from Bihar, two from Jharkhand and three from Uttarakhand.

Rahul Wani created playing kits for the whole team consisting of blazers, trousers and shirts displaying AIPA's logo and the Indian national flag.

Even though high-level Indian picklers like Manish Rao, Atul Edward, Shanai Mehta and Anish Mehta have competed in international tournaments before, none have ever done so on behalf of their country. As such, it was a special treat to see a pickleball team in their national colors for the first time.

The tournament consisted of three events: men's doubles, mixed doubles and women's doubles.

The initial rounds were played in a round-robin style, where four groups had to play three matches. The top two teams from each group qualified for the knock-out rounds.

The following pairs from India reached the qualifying rounds in men's doubles: Manish and Sachin, Dr. Bharat and Ashwani, Anand and Siddarth, and Gajendra and Gourav.

The three medal positions would all be won by Indian players, but it was anyone's guess as to which pair would come out on top.

While playing the semi-finals against Anand and Siddarth, Sachin started cramping. He tried to continue

through the pain, but ended up collapsing on the court due to a pulled muscle.

Fifteen minutes were allowed for injury time, but Sachin couldn't recover that quickly, so the pair decided to forfeit.

The incident proved very lucky for Anand/Siddharth, who went on to overcome Dr. Bharat/Ashwani to become the men's doubles gold medalists.

This was a fairy tale ending for the pair, who had lost the first set 11-0 due to nerves, then regained their composure to beat the favored pair of Dr. Bharat/Ashwani 11-0, 9-11, 4-11.

The mixed doubles finals came down to Cable/Fang vs. Niraj/Megha. The Thai pair was very aggressive and won the first set 11-4, then Niraj/Megha pulled up their socks and won the second set against all odds. The final set was an epic one, with Megha in particular pushing herself to the limit, but it wasn't enough to save the team. Cable and Fang kept their nerves to win the third set, and with that, mixed doubles gold.

The final scores were 11-4, 5-11 and 11-5.

The women's doubles had a different format: Instead of fixed partners, the players had a chance to partner with and against every other player over several matches. It

was a unique experience, with the results declared on an individual basis.

Thai pickler Fang was declared the winner based on overall points, with Rekha from India nabbing second.

Each participating player received a certificate, and the winners were given gold/silver/bronze medals with t-shirts as mementos.

Thanks to the Bangkok Open, many players from India and Thailand developed a mutual respect for one another. During the closing ceremony, I expressed the desire to set up an Asian Federation of Pickleball—a wish that was applauded by all players present. •

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