

# sports



Indian boys team who finished runners-up in the recently-concluded Asian Junior squash championship. PHOTO: MARTIN LOUIS

## SO NEAR, YET SO FAR

V. BALAJI

CHENNAI

National squash coach Cyrus Poncha is a happy man and why not. The performance of the junior boys in the Asian championships team event was almost perfect. Only if Ravi Dixit had pulled off the second match India was in with a chance to create history. It was third time unlucky for India as they finished runners-up after 1993 and 2003.

"I knew we had a chance to reach the semifinal and all that was required from there was one good match. Beating Hong Kong in the round-robin made our task easier," said Cyrus. The nucleus of this side would stay for the junior Worlds to be held in Chennai in July. "We are a young team. They have all grown up here at the ICL Academy and I am sure they will use it to their advantage in July," added the coach.

In fact it was the inexperience that undid India in the final. Ravi Dixit who had a good ten days faltered when it mattered. He kept trying the

drop shot and gave away too many easy points to Kamran Kahn. It was only logic he put a stroke in the backburner that was not working on the given day. "I really expected it come off but it didn't. I am pleased with my show but as always it could have been better," explained Ravi. The ICL Academy trainee is easily one of the most improved players in Asian junior circuit, according to Cyrus who himself was named the junior coach of the year.

The heartening aspect of India was their bench strength. There was always someone who raised to the occasion. Karan Malik was the hero in the match against Hong Kong where he won the marathon second tie that helped India draw parity. The lanky 12th standard student was also pleased with his own show but did not lose sight of the bigger picture.

"It was a good team effort and personally there are areas I have work on with immediate effect. I have to improve my ball control and shot selection. I have to be more patient especially when I play against higher ranked players,"

noted Karan. It was a pity that Karan did not get an opportunity to take court against Malaysia but he had done his job to perfection in piloting the team to the final. He had only plaudits to receive from Cyrus. "He has played a tight game and his basics are strongly in place. He can only improve from here."

The only sore point was the form of Aditya Jagtap. Given top billing by the team management he hardly did anything to prove them right. However, Aditya was not to be perturbed. "I am not disappointed. Leo Au and Ivan Yuen are senior to me. Their experience is bigger and they are stronger, I am only 16 and coming back from an injury did not help either."

To be fair to Aditya, Leo and Ivan are a notch higher and it was not easy for him to match up. The attitude on court was questionable though. There is no harm in losing but losing without a fight is not a good sign. Barring a few aching points it was a tournament that augured well for India. There were enough indications of good things to come.

## Players' welfare foremost: Srivats

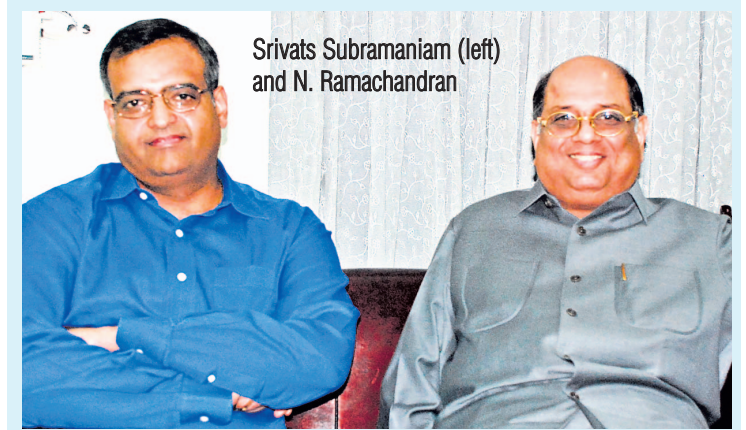
Srivats Subramaniam's responsibilities have just become bigger. The SRFI secretary-general is now also the vice-president of the Asian Squash Federation (ASF). The newly-elected vice-president who took his chair unopposed vows to put players' interest first and improve the standard of refereeing apart from providing more expose for players who are training their thoughts on the Commonwealth Games to be held in Delhi in 2010.

Srivats will be in charge of three important portfolios for the Asian region. He will be overlooking refereeing, coaching and championships. "Asia is the biggest region and, without a doubt, the one with a huge potential for growth. All the major prize money events are from here. Asia is the fulcrum of world squash and we will do everything for the game to reach wider horizons," said Srivats. Another agenda is the ASF lobbying hard collectively to include squash as a medal sport in the 2016 Olympics where squash is in direct competition with rugby and golf.

The blueprint for progress is already sketched. Plans are in place to make the game reach the masses. "The three vice-presidents have agreed to meet at least twice a year to try and understand where we are heading for. Successful conduct of the CW Games will go a long way in providing the base for the sport to be taken up by more youngsters in the continent," noted Srivats. As many as 20 medals are at stake in squash in the CW Games. With players like Saurav Ghosal, Dipika Pallikal and Joshna Chinnappa making steady progress, India are in with a good chance of making the podium in New Delhi.

The SRFI is planning to conduct a fair number of Satellite and preparatory tournaments that would provide good exposure for the Indian players before the CW Games. "We will try and host maximum number of tournaments to help the players before the main event. The junior world championship in July is another big one on the calendar," explained Srivats.

■ V. BALAJI



Srivats Subramaniam (left) and N. Ramchandran

## Anaka stood out with gallant display

OUR CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

There were quite a few moments of joy for the Indian camp in the Asian juniors. Among them was the gallant displays of Anaka Alankamony was foremost. The 14-year-old Anaka showed tremendous fighting qualities on court. The stand out show was her win over Kan Man Lee in the team event. "I wanted that victory badly especially after losing to her in the individual event,"



said the 10th class student of Sacred Heart School.

Cyrus who has played a pivotal role in Anaka's career is proud of her resolve on court. "For someone so young she shows abundant spirit. She puts in a lot of effort and is never shy of hard work. She is the dream of every coach." Anaka is thankful to her supportive family, school and the excellent facilities at the ICL Academy for making the player she is today.

There were facets of her game that needs to be toned. She has to work on her temperament. The pride of youth ushers is a few rushed strokes. She will learn with experience. Another area Anaka has to lay stress on is her finishing shots. Cyrus has it all

marked and will put Anaka through the paces after she takes a few days off from the grinding schedule.

The match against Kan Lee lasted more than 50 minutes, but there was definite tightness throughout the match and Anaka cannot stop singing praises on consultant coach Major Maniam. "It was after my loss in the singles that we sat down and watched the footage of the match. Maniam sir pointed out a few flaws. He ensured I kept my drives straight and had the ball close to the side-wall. By doing this, I was giving little opportunity to my opponent," explained Anaka.

The effort against Kan Lee was no flash in the pan. Against a much fancied Low Wee

Nee (sister of Asian champion Low Wee Wern) Anaka fought hard. She even took the first game and had a game point in one of the three games she lost. It was close match where Anaka proved she was not to be bogged down by the big names.

Cyrus is realistic on his prediction of Anaka. "She is the No. 1 in Asia in the under-15 category. She lost in the British Open quarterfinals to the eventual champion. The real test starts now. She needs to improve her fitness and game quickly as competition will get tough from here. She will get better with age but more importantly has the heart for a battle," added Cyrus. Sure a lot of that positive attitude was in display during the Asian juniors.