

## SAIL Open Challenger will severely test Indians

Some highly promising players will be seen in action at the \$50,000 SAIL Open ATP Challenger, starting here at the DLTA Complex Monday.

Lu Yen-hsun of Chinese Taipei (Taiwan), Go Soeda of Japan, Gilles Muller of Luxembourg, Kristian Pless of Denmark, Alun Jones of Australia and Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi of Pakistan are all in the top 200 ATP rankings and are expected to add to the quality of play.

Yen-hsun is the highest ranked player at 90, and he is the top seed. He is in top form, having made it to the finals of the Lanzarote Challengers in Spain and Busan Challengers in Korea before coming here.

To his credit, the Taiwanese has also made a Grand Slam appearance, playing in the Australian Open this year. Though he was ousted by Frenchman Marc Gicquel in the first round, he stretched the world No. 73 to five sets before losing.

Yen-hsun plays the only Indian to come through the qualifiers, Mustafa Ghouse, in the first round and could play another Indian in the second round if wildcard Harsh Mankad gets past Frenchman Thomas Oger.

Yen-hsun will find a potential threat in Soeda (132) whom he met in the finals of Busan Challenger mid April. Though Yen Hsun had to concede the match because of injury he had won the first set 6-2.

Soeda was the part of the losing Japanese Davis Cup squad that lost to India last month. He had given the Indian grass court expert Prakash Amritraj a run for his money and squandered a match point before losing over five sets. The Challenger will not only test Prakash severely, but also the other Indians.

Soeda, seeded fourth here and a far better player on hard court, will therefore be eager to prove his mettle when he plays his first round match against another Indian Davis Cupper Rohan Bopanna, who is a good 171 rungs below the Japanese in the rankings.

It will also be interesting to see how Bopanna, who has not played in any tournament since Davis Cup last month, deals with the challenge from the 23-year-old who won the Busan Challenger and Kyoto Challengers before coming here.

Amritraj (246), the highest ranked Indian, is pitted against 198th ranked Brendan Evans of the US. He, however, can draw some solace from the recent poor run of Evans who made successive first round exits from the USTA Tallahassee and Baton Rouge LA Challengers last month.

However, all eyes will be on Indian teen sensation and wild card entry Yuki Bhambri, who led India to World Group finals in the junior Davis Cup, when he faces Australian Adam Feeney.

American Indian Rajeev Ram plays sixth-seeded Pakistani Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi while third Indian wild-card Ashutosh Singh meets eighth seed Alexandre Kudryavtsev of Russia.

Coping with heat is going to be a crucial factor for all the players and whether the Indians can use the weather conditions to their advantage, can be seen as the event progresses.

The seedings:

1. Lu Yen-hsun (Taiwan), 2. Giles Muller (Luxembourg), 3. Kristian Pless (Denmark), 4. Go Soeda (Japan), 5. Alun Jones (Australia), 6. Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi (Pakistan), 7. Brendan Evans (U.S.), 8. Alexandre Kudryatsev (Russia).

( © IANS / India eNews)