

## India in world junior men's squash semis

India stunned favourites France to enter the semifinals of the 15th world junior men's squash championship for their best-ever result in the competition.

At the Vitis Squash club here Wednesday, India came from behind to beat France who squandered a 1-0 lead.

First on court was the flamboyant Vikram Malhotra who came out with all guns blazing. Showing no awe of his higher ranked opponent Gregoire Marche, Vikram kept a very fast pace and hit a series of winners to win the first game 9-1 in double quick time.

In the second game Vikram ran up a 4-0 lead, but Gregoire was the steadier of the two to take the game and went on to wrap up the match 3-1.

Aditya Jagtap was next on against Lucas Vauzelle to whom he had lost in a European event last year. But from the onset, Aditya looked determined and played aggressive squash to give his opponent little chance.

Aditya oozed confidence as he had his opponent scrambling all over the court. Aditya levelled the match for India by winning 3-0.

The decider was a cliff hanger. Ravi Dixit started off nervously against Antoine-Camille Petrucci and was soon 0-2 down in games and 2-5 down in the third. At this point, he staged a most remarkable comeback.

If he was only retrieving in the first two games, he was now attacking at will. His opponent was slowing down and Ravi capitalised on this, making him move to all four corners of the court.

A dejected Antoine simply could not keep up with the pace and succumbed rapidly. Ravi won 3-2 and India made it to the semis for the first time.

India now play second seeds Pakistan in the semifinals while top seeds and defending champions Egypt meet England.

Before this, India's best ever result was attaining fifth position in 2002 with Saurav Ghosal, Siddharth Suchde, Gaurav Nandrajog and Sahil Vora. Since then, India have managed to remain in the top six at all world junior championships.

Apart from Vikram who turns 19 this year, the other three boys are eligible to participate in the next championship in two years time.

At the start of the championships, Maj. (Retd) S Maniam, consultant coach, SRFI, said: 'Looking at what is on display here I am convinced a top four position is definitely on the cards in 2010.'

After Wednesday's victory he said: 'It was an absolutely outstanding show by three players who believed in themselves and we can now dare to dream to lift the title in two years time.'

'Vikram Malhotra, Aditya Jagtap, Ravi Dixit and Ramit Tandon have done us proud,' said National coach Cyrus Poncha.

Results:

India beat France 2-1: Vikram Malhotra lost to Gregoire Marche 9-1, 4-9, 0-9, 1-9; Aditya Jagtap beat Lucas Vauzelle 9-6, 9-2, 9-5; Ravi Dixit beat Petrucci Antoine Camille 8-10, 2-9, 9-7, 9-1, 9-2.

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