

Paes steps down as Indian Davis Cup captain

After months of bitter row that saw the almost the Davis Cup team refusing to play under Leander Paes, the old warhorse stepped down from the captaincy Tuesday. Former Davis Cupper S. P. Misra has been named the non-playing captain for the tie against Romania in the World Group play-off in September.

Paes informed All India Tennis Association (AITA) Secretary General Anil Khanna about his decision during a meeting in Beijing just after the Olympics doubles tennis event, an AITA statement said.

Misra told IANS from Secunderabad that it was an honour for him to lead a squad that includes two great champion players and two highly talented youngsters.

'With Paes and (Mahesh) Bhupathi in the team and highly rated young players like Prakash Amritraj and Somdev Devvarman, we should be able to battle it out with Romania who will be hard to beat at home,' Misra said.

Misra said contrary to general belief, the Davis Cup squad had always been a cohesive unit and played in the right spirit. 'I have every reason to believe the team will put up a good show.'

Paes said he would like to step down as captain as he wanted the best Davis cup team to represent the nation.

It may be recalled that three of Paes's teammates led by Bhupathi had revolted against him and wanted him removed as captaincy after the Davis Cup tie against Uzbekistan in February. Rohan Bopanna, Prakash Amritraj joined Bhupathi in the revolt.

Besides Paes and Bhupathi, Somdev Devvarman and Amritraj will represent India in the tie to be held on red clay in Clubul Sportiv Progresul, Bucuresti from Sept 19-21.

Meanwhile, the selection committee dropped Bopanna because of his poor form.

Khanna said the selection of the Davis Cup team has been done purely on merit.

Devvarman, 23, is a reigning NCAA champion and turned pro after passing out of the University of Virginia in May.

Devvarman last month won his first challenger at Lexington on his very first Tour appearance and made a giant leap in the ATP singles rankings to be placed at 239.

On the other hand, Amritraj reached the final of Hall of Fame tennis last Monday, becoming first Indian player in a decade since Paes to do so. He then went on to reach the quarter-finals of Aptos challenger and is currently placed 217. Bopanna, meanwhile is ranked 321.

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