

## Vikram-Abhijeet win nationals doubles, Sriram to meet Rajneet

Sriram Balaji Narayanaswamy will meet top seed Ranjit Virali Murugesan in the singles final Saturday even as Vikram Reddy and Abhijeet Tiwari upset third seeds Mithun Murali and Vinod Sridhar 6-4, 6-7(2), 10-4 to clinch the doubles title in the DSCL men's tennis nationals at DLTA stadium here Friday.

Sriram saved a match point to thwart a tough challenge from Madkekar 4-6, 7-6(2), 6-1 while Ranjit sent an erring Kamala Kannan packing 6-1, 6-1.

In a battle of big serves and all-court game, it was Madkekar who with his power-packed shots and experience reined in Sriram. But Sriram despite being a set and a break down, persevered to emerge victorious.

Madkekar, in the first set, broke 18-year-old Sriram in the ninth game and then served out the set in the next game.

Madkekar underlined his supremacy in the second set as he snapped Sriram's serve in the fifth game and then won a love game to take a 4-2 lead. But Sriram was not prepared to throw the towel yet and in the tenth game, he not only saved a match point but also broke Madkekar to bring the match alive at 5-5.

The game went to the tie-break where Madkekar succumbed to a rash of errors and Sriram with four mini-breaks took the match to the third set.

In the decider, Madkekar fizzled out as he sprayed a series of unforced errors. A resurgent Sriram wasted no time in cashing on it. He broke an exhausted Madkekar thrice to win the match in two hours and 20 minutes.

Madkekar, who got the top billing in the tournament last year, termed it a 'bad loss' and attributed it to his eleven month injury lay-off.

'It is one thing to be fit and another to be match fit. I have returned to the circuit after suffering from a back and a shoulder injury. As a result I lacked the intensity in the third set and suffered from lapse in concentration,' said a dejected Madkekar.

'I made a lot of errors in the tie-break and it turned out to be the turning point in the match. I just was not up to the challenge in the final set.'

Sriram said that once he broke Madkekar, he felt confident of coming back in the match.

'My serves were going well. I was 3-4 down but I kept backing myself. After getting the break in the tenth game, I felt I have chances. I was taking each game as it came and was relying on my serves,' Balaji said.

In the other semi-final, Ranjeet, in a clinical fare, mowed down a hapless Kannan in 54 minutes.

So strong was Ranjeet's grip on the match that it was only after five games that Kannan could win

his first and only game in the first set.

The second set proved to be no different as Kannan continued to make unforced errors to make Ranjeet's task easy.

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