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Sport



Rohan Bopanna prevails over a fighting Salifu

Kamesh Srinivasan

Jaco Mathew-Ashutosh Singh win doubles title

- PHOTO: V.V. KRISHNAN



WINNING DUO: Jaco Mathew (left) and Ashutosh Singh, who won the doubles crown.

GURGAON: Top seed Rohan Bopanna reached the final but was tested on his way to a 5-7, 6-3, 6-4 triumph by Salifu Mohammed of Ghana in the semifinals of the ITF Satellite tennis tournament at the NTA Complex here on Friday.

The 25-year-old Bopanna, in his bid to sharpen his game for the more challenging assignments ahead, will take on the Indonesian Davis Cupper Prima Simpatiaji who outwitted Gurmehar Singh in the other semifinal.

Bopanna, in partnership with Vijay Kannan, failed to add a doubles title to his collection as second-seeded Jaco Mathew and Ashutosh Singh beat them in the final in three sets.

Winds play havoc

Bopanna, after having raced to 5-3, 30-0 lead in the first set, lost focus when the winds played havoc. To his credit, Salifu came up with a string of spectacular shots, the inside-out forehand in particular, to put the fear of defeat in the mind of Bopanna.

Bopanna delivered a doublefault to face a breakpoint in that eventful ninth game and Salifu came up with a forceful forehand to seal the break.

Thereafter, the 18-year-old Davis Cupper swept the next three games to take the initiative. It was the first time in the tournament that someone had taken a set off Bopanna.

In the next two sets, Bopanna — who opted to engage his opponent in rallies rather than hurry to finish the points — broke in the sixth game of the second and one in the first game of the third set.

"I was struggling to get my rhythm. It was tough from both sides. It should have been a straight-forward match, but am glad to have pulled it off eventually as the conditions tended to nullify my advantage," said Bopanna.

"My idea was to keep the ball away from his forehand. He was serving big and it was tough to react when the wind was behind him," said Salifu.



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Gurmehar ousted

The 23-year-old Simpatiaji had reason to be equally happy, as the wild card made the final with a straight set victory over Gurmehar.

Gurmehar recovered from a break in the first game to lead 5-2 against Simpatiaji, but lost his way from there as he dropped serve in the ninth game with two doublefaults from deuce while serving for the set. After an initial exchange of breaks in the second set, Gurmehar was broken in the fourth game and that proved decisive in the eventual analysis.

In the doubles, Ashutosh and Mathew started shakily but recovered soon to beat the top-seeded pair of Bopanna and Vijay Kannan.

The results: Singles (semifinals): Rohan Bopanna bt Salifu Mohammed (Gha) 5-7, 6-3, 6-4; Prima Simpatiaji (Ina) bt Gurmehar Singh 7-6(4), 6-3.

Doubles (final): Jaco Mathew/Ashutosh Singh bt Rohan Bopanna/Vijay Kannan 4-6, 7-6(2), 6-4.

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