India's 2024 Thomas & Uber Cup campaign kicks off in Chengdu, China on the 27th of April. Considered the 'World Cup' of badminton, this tournament has no direct bearing on the upcoming Paris Olympics, but the performance of India's star badminton players under high-pressure situations will be noted.

Thomas Cup

The Indian team embarks on the defence of a title that changed everything in Indian men's badminton when they won it in May 2022. India were rank underdogs then, but pulled off upset after upset to win the tournament. Consequently, as defending champions, there are greater expectations from the team. Even if a repeat gold isn't possible (the last five champions have been different), a medal is considered a realistic prospect this time around.

However, India could not have picked a tougher draw for their title defence, placed in the 'Group of Death' alongside 14-time world champions Indonesia; a Thailand team consisting of reigning men's singles world champion, Kunlavut Vitidsarn; as well as England, who can spring a few surprises of their own. Only the top two will advance to the quarterfinals from Group C and India will have their work cut out when they begin their campaign against Thailand on the 27th of April.

As for India's singles, plenty has changed since the win in 2022. Then, Prannoy was the India no. 3, proving the hardened steel of his mettle we would go on to see in the next year at the World Championships and Asian Games. Now, he is India no. 1, a top 10 player with tangible feats and big medals heading to his first Olympics. He's not had the best of starts to the season, with an India Open semifinal run being his only feat of note amidst a recurrence of his gastric issues. Ahead of the Paris Olympics, the Thomas Cup is an important tournament to assess his form, with a caveat of him playing all the no.1 players from other teams. However, Prannoy is a regular giant slayer and will be raring to go now - not as the clincher but the one to lay the foundation.

Yet, India's men's badminton players have raised their game in team championships, and the 2022 Thomas Cup win was a springboard for success. Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty often attribute their run of recent history-making victories to the way they won the Thomas Cup, and have already stated that a medal in the 2024 edition is a goal.

The pair have had a superb start to the year - with three straight finals and a title before a slight dip courtesy an early All England exit. It was followed by a withdrawal due to injury from the Badminton Asia Championships - this was preventative as fitness and calendar management would be crucial for their peak heading into the Olympics. The duo lock up one end of the doubles, but the second men's doubles pair continues to be a weak spot for India. MR Arjun and Dhruv Kapila. will look to make the most of the opportunity and the team dynamic always inspires the best from its players. Arjun is returning from injury so playing together will be good match practice at the highest level.