



*Match Report Day Four: Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> June*

### **Anxious moments, RP-SG Mavericks by the minimal margin**

Success in their opening tie in India's CEAT Ultimate League powered by Kellogg's, some three days earlier when facing Empowerjj Challengers, a 13-8 victory margin being the outcome; in their second contest Pune on Sunday 17th June, once again for RP-SG Mavericks it was success. Only this time the contest was much closer.

They recorded an 11-10 win against Maharashtra United, who for the second time had suffered by the one game difference. On the opening day they had lost to Falcons.

RP-SG Mavericks selected Mattias Karlsson, Kou Lei, Doo Hoi Kem and Sabine Winter, alongside Harmeet Desai and Ayhika Mukherjee; for the Maharashtra United, Kristian Karlsson, João Monteiro, Elizabeta Samara and Lily Zhang entered the arena, the Indian representatives being Amalraj Anthony and Madhurika Patkar.

Tension, against the combination racket of Ayhika Mukherjee, anti-spin rubber, Lily Zhang was somewhat tentative at the start of the contest; she trailed 4-9, recovered to level at 9-11, before losing the next point and then securing two in a row finishing with the golden point to win the game.

The outcome suggested that had adjusted to the style of the Indian player and would now assert her authority; it was quite the opposite, Ayhika Mukherjee dominated the second. In the third at the change of ends Lily Zhang led 5-3 but at 10-8 Ayhika Mukherjee held two game points: Lily Zhang saved both but the verdict went in favour of Ayhika Mukherjee, she won the golden point. It was advantage RP-SG Mavericks.

The lead was extended in the next contest. Earlier in the year at the ITTF Challenge Polish Open, Kou Lei had beaten Amalraj Anthony but in Pune with just one table, the crowd going stark, staring bonkers it was a very different atmosphere. Amalraj Anthony did not make the best start but recovered to win the first game on the "golden point". In the second game, responding to the intensity of the hour, at 10-8, he held two games point; Kou Lei won the next three to level, both games being settled on the "golden point rule".

In the third at the change of ends, Kou Lei led 5-4; now finding a rhythm he played error free, he surrendered just one point, thus he doubled his team's advantage.

*“At the start of the match, Amalraj could not put the ball on the table; then he adapted and at the end of the first game he played well and he kept that good form at the start of the second game. I played him earlier this year in Poland and won four-nil; also I knew how he played, we were both in the same team here last year, we played for the Dabang Smashers. In this format of play it is very tough; you are under pressure all the time.” Kou Lei*

RP-SG Mavericks in the ascendancy, Harmeet Desai and Doo Hoi Kem extended the advantage by emulating their colleagues. They recorded a two-one win in opposition to Amalraj Anthony and Elizabeta Samara. The RP-SG Mavericks pair never let their opponents settle, they seized the opportunities that arose, the first to attack, maintaining high tempo, the ability over the table to return service in a positive manner being a key factor. It was not until the third game, when the Maharashtra duo found a rhythm to their play.

Troubled times for Maharashtra United, enter Kristian Karlsson in a contest that underlined the sheer desire of the teams in the competition. He faced doubles partner, the man with whom he had secured bronze at the recent Liebherr 2018 World Team Championships, he confronted Mattias Karlsson. Playing at a high tempo, he captured the first two games but then in the third trailed 6-10; he won the next point with the faintest of edges, Mattias Karlsson to his great credit advising the umpire the ball had touched.

A stroke of fortune, Kristian Karlsson levelled at 10-all; once again a “golden point”, it went to Mattias Karlsson. Maharashtra United retained their lead but the gap was reduced to two games.

In the very next match the tables were turned. Against Doo Hoi Kem, Elizabeta Samara was the faster out of the blocks; positive she secured the opening two games but in the second experienced some problems returning the Doo Hoi Kem service, she trailed 9-10, she levelled and then won the golden point to level the overall score in the tie.

Tense moments, in the third game at the change of ends, Doo Hoi Kem led 5-4 but at 10-8, Elizabeta Samara held two game points. She converted to secure a three-nil win; now it was a one game advantage in favour of Maharashtra United.

*“Earlier the doubles, it was difficult; I’ve never partnered anyone in Mixed Doubles from outside Romania. I was confused I did not know how I should anticipate. Against Doo Hoi Kem I felt the ball well; here the ball jumps so it is difficult to block. I won three-nil, I’m happy with that result.” Elizabeta Samara*

The contest in the balance, against João Monteiro, Harmeet Desai, having trailed throughout the opening game gained the lead at the most vital moment of all; he won the precious golden point. In the second game, once again he trailed, he was 4-9 in arrears, he levelled at 9-all but this time was unable to complete highway robbery. In the third game, in total contrast to the previous two, at the change of ends he led 5-2.

Now it was the turn of João Monteiro to recover, he levelled at 6-all; again at 9-all it was parity but at 10-9 it was game point to Harmeet Desai. Astute, in control of his

emotions, João Monteiro secured the next point and the golden point, Maharashtra United held a two games lead.

Enter Sabine Winter, three days earlier when facing Empowerji Challengers, she had beaten Divya Deshpande in three straight games to secure victory for her team but that was a very different situation; on that occasion RP-SG Mavericks led 10-8; against Maharashtra United the score-line was the exact opposite.

Facing Madhurika Patkar, Sabine Winter secured the opening game but then in the second trailed 6-8 before recovering to level at 9-all and then clinching the next two points. In the context of the overall tie it was parity 10-all.

At the change of ends in the third game, Sabine Winter led 5-4 but at 8-10 was on the precipice of defeat. Fighting for the cause she won the next two points; then with a forehand to savour secured the golden point and a one game win for RP-SG Mavericks.

*Playing last it's hard especially today when if you lose one game, your team has lost. In the second game I led 5-1; then I was down 8-10. I know I should win but in this format every game counts. You are always under pressure; in the third game I missed some forehands but at the end the forehand worked well." Sabine Winter*

It was success by the very narrowest of margins.

#### RP-SG MAVERICKS 11–10 MAHARASHTRA UNITED

Ayhika Mukherjee v Lily Zhang	10-11, 11-5, 11-10	2-1 (2-1)
Kou Lei v Amalraj Anthony	10-11, 11-10, 11-5	2-1 (4-2)
Harmeet Desai / Doo Hoi Kem v Amalraj Anthony / Elizabeta Samara	11-5, 11-6, 5-11	2-1 (6-3)
Mattias Karlsson v Kristian Karlsson	9-11, 6-11, 11-10	1-2 (7-5)
Doo Hoi Kem v Elizabeta Samara	5-11, 10-11, 8-11	0-3 (7-8)
Harmeet Desai v João Monteiro	11-10, 9-11, 10-11	1-2 (8-10)
Sabine Winter v Madhurika Patkar	11-7, 11-9, 11-10	3-0 (11-10)

#### POSITIONS (SUNDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> JUNE)

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5
RP-SG MAVERICKS	13 (13)	11 (24)			
MAHARASHTRA UNITED	10 (10)	10 (20)			
DABANG SMASHERS	14 (14)				
FALCONS TTC	11 (11)				
EMPOWERJI CHALLENGERS	8 (8)				
WARRIORS TTC	7 (7)				