

CG's Aakarshi wins gold in badminton

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Raipur: Still recovering from a knee injury, Chhattisgarh's star shuttler Aakarshi Kashyap put in a dominating performance from the very first set of the final, played under the 36th National Games badminton championship in Gujarat on Thursday, to win the first national games gold medal in her first appearance.

The second seed, Aakarshi, outclassed her opponent first seed Malvika Bansod of Maharashtra in two straight sets 21-08, 22-20 that lasted for 44 minutes, despite her injury. Malvika had to settle for the silver medal. Earlier, Aakarshi defeated Tanya Hemant of Karnataka by 21-13, 21-15 in the semi-finals.

The Bhilai girl Aakarshi had a significant role in India's silver medal in the Commonwealth Games held at Birmingham this year.

Aakarshi at present holds the first rank in Badminton Association of India (BAI) ranking while Malvika holds the second. Similarly, Malvika holds the 41st ranking in world ranking while Aakarshi holds the 47th ranking.

Aakarshi told **TOI** that she could not make it to the final of the International Badminton Championship held in Raipur in September this year because of her knee injury and she was recovering from it. "Even as I am still recovering from the injury, I decided to participate in the National Games because of my future tournament. The gold medal at national games gave me a lot of confidence as I am preparing for the international events to be held in Maldives, Germany and Australia," she said.

BAI general secretary Sanjay Mishra, who is also a veteran shuttler and former India coach, said that both Malvika and Aakarshi are equally skilled and talented. "Both of them have been my students in the early days of their career. It is being



AAKARSHI KASHYAP

noticed in recent times that when Malvika beat Aakarshi in an event, Aakarshi fights back in the very next tournament to take the revenge. So it is difficult to rate them," Mishra said. Aakarshi and Malvika have so far played six singles matches against each in major tournaments and they have won three each, said Mishra. Chhattisgarh Badminton Association has announced a cash prize of Rs

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Aakarshi's first win was at the All India Ranking Tournament at Sivakasi on August 24, 2014 followed by the national title at Visakhapatnam in November 2015. On 28 April 2016, the Chhattisgarh shuttler won the twin crowns in the U-15 and U-17 girls single category at the Junior Badminton Championship Season 2 National Finals. She was selected to represent India in the badminton Asia U-15 and U-17 junior championships held at Kudus, Indonesia where she bagged a bronze medal.

In November 2017 Aakarshi lost to the London Games Bronze Medallist Saina Nehwal in the senior National Badminton Championship, but this match drew her into the spotlight. In December 2017 she registered double win in the 42nd Junior National Badminton Championship (U-17, U-19) held in Guwahati.

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