

Sreypov powers on, Ponlok gets off mark

HS Manjunath

THE third National Junior Tournament, which concluded at the National Tennis Center on Sunday, threw up several surprises, shocks and breakthroughs, but none of them had any impact on rock-solid Hour Sreypov, who continues to tower over the rest in her age group and is unbeaten in tournament play for well over a year.

The wonder girl from Boueng Khyang raced to her ninth competition success, taking out a gritty Sary Sodaney 7-6, 6-0 in the girls under-14 final.

The surprising bit in the whole contest was Sodaney driving the first set to a tie-break and making her rival work really hard to earn it. Though her approach was more defensive, Sodaney, who also made the final in the previous tournament, managed to keep Sreypov on her toes.

But once the first set was in her bag, Sreypov was a different player on court in the second as she skipped away to a love set.

The boys under-14 final was a setback for Kep's poster boy Sen Sophon of Aspeca. The winner of the two previous tournaments, Sen Sophon met his match in local hope Klang Ponlok, who played well above himself to record his maiden triumph after several failed attempts.

The 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 win for Ponlok was a reward for his hard work in training over the last few months. Gone were

the slew of unforced errors that used to hamper his game.

Once he cut down on mistakes, Ponlok could shift the pressure on Sophon, who was clearly less steadier than in his previous performances. The two-time champ was undone by some clever drop shots and nice angles Ponlok came up with.

Victory for Ith Leakhana in the girls under-18 event was a major breakthrough in that for the first time she emerged from the shadows of her schoolmate and friend Cheng Channeang, who had always enjoyed an upper hand on the court.

Leakhana, who won 6-3, 6-1, had gone close to beating her friend quite a few times in previous battles but never managed it. That trend was broken once Leakhana took hold of the match by driving Channeang out of her comfort zone and exploiting the errors that inevitably followed.

The boys under-18 final went along predictable lines, with Chheang Vannasak beating his rival from Kep, Chay Chen of Aspeca, 6-2, 6-0.

The boys under-12 category saw Cheum Seyha beat the No 1 player in his age group Leng Sarinreach for the first time in several meetings. Seyha, who won 6-4, 6-4, played smart and steady while his rival aiming for outright winners fell into a bundle of errors.

For the first time in junior competition, Tennis Cambodia introduced a second tier in the under-12 class for

players who are still raw and not quite ready to handle the livelier and bouncier yellow ball.

Tagged as Flight B, the event was played with green dot balls which are 25 per cent less pressurised. Nel Samnang from Boueng Khyang defeated Ngong San of Aspeca, Kep, 6-2, 6-2 in the final.

Players from Battambang took part in the junior nationals for the first time ever. Among the players from the province who caught the eye was Mut, who

had been on a real tennis court only once before. He put up a brave show by making it to the Flight B semis after upsetting the top seed in the quarter-finals. He lost a close call in his semi but was all the wiser for the thrilling experience.

The six-event Junior national series is jointly sponsored by Ezecom, Coca-Cola and Hagar Restaurant, while the Cambodian Country Club has lent additional support by allowing the use of the club courts for competition. ■



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