

# New Indian tandem a doubles delight

By YU YILEI  
CHINA DAILY

**GUANGZHOU** — Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi are the most frequently mentioned names when talking about Indian men's tennis.

However a new, dynamic Indian pair has arrived on the scene and is poised to accept the baton from its famous compatriots. Somdev Devvarman and Sanam Krishan Singh clinched the men's doubles gold medal at the Guangzhou Asian Games on Monday in what could be the dawning of a new era in Indian tennis.

"This is the best moment in my life. It is the first time I have played for India and to get a gold medal with Somdev is special. It's a dream come true," said Singh after the Indians defeated the Chinese pair of Gong Maoxin and Li Zhe 6-3, 6-7 (4), 10-8.

The pair had only played together once before the Asiad, thanks to a wild-card entry into January's Chennai Open on home soil. They reached the semifinals in that event.

Despite a successful international debut, they did not expect to play together in Guangzhou.

Singh, 22, is a senior at the University of Virginia with little professional experience and no ATP ranking while Devvarman, 25, is a pro who once was ranked 94 in the world and made it to the final of the

Chennai Open in 2009, where he lost to Croatia's Marin Cilic.

But when Paes and Bhupathi were not available for the Guangzhou Games, Singh was afforded a spot on the Indian roster.

"It's a great honor for me to represent India and I'm happy I was able to do this well this week," he said.

His inclusion meant he was able to play alongside close friend Devvarman.

The latter put on hold his dream of becoming a professional player in 2004 and moved to the United States to attend the University of Virginia, which boasts one of the best college tennis programs in the US.

He won two NCAA titles in back-to-back seasons, defeating John Isner in 2007 and JP Smith in 2008, before he developed into the top-ranked Indian pro.

That prompted Singh to make the same decision and follow in Devvarman's footsteps.

"I was actually talking with him before I went there," said Singh, a native of Chandigarh. "It helped me to make my decision."

Virginia head coach Brian Boland also believes Devvarman played a pivotal role in Singh's decision.

"Sanam's early mindset was to turn professional and not go to college," Boland told the Asian Games News Service in an e-mail interview. "However, after he saw the improvement in Somdev's game, he began to see college as a real option."

Singh soon took the same path as Devvarman, who graduated with a degree in sociology in 2008.

Devvarman was briefly ranked



NICOLAS ASFOURI / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

**Somdev Devvarman (left) and Sanam Krishan Singh of India celebrate their win over Gong Maoxin and Li Zhe of China in the final of the men's doubles tennis competition on Monday.**

the No 1 player in the Intercollegiate Tennis Association rankings in 2005. In March, Singh reached No 2.

Interestingly, the two never played with each other in Virginia. But their performances already show a special chemistry that Paes and Bhupathi once shared.

"We are very good friends and very close," said Devvarman. "I

feel like that's why we gel well together and we complement each other's games. We are happy that we have had the chance to do this."

However, there is still a long way to go before the two play together consistently as Singh still has six months to go before hopefully graduating with a degree in foreign affairs. He had to ask for

a break from his studies to play in Guangzhou.

Also, his low ranking could prevent him from attending the same professional tournaments as Devvarman.

"I will go back to college and get my degree first," Singh said. "I also have to lift my ranking so that we can play in the same tournaments in the future."

# Fortune smiles on Asia's 'god of cycling' as he bags a hat-trick

By TANG ZHE  
CHINA DAILY

**GUANGZHOU** — It might have been the longest 15 minutes in Wong Kam Po's 16 years at the Asian Games.

In between finishing the men's individual road race 0.01 of a second behind Korea's Park Sung-baek on Monday and waiting for the judges to deliberate on a called foul, the 37-year-old Hong Kong racer must have wondered whether the gods were on his side.

As it turns out, they were, and the man dubbed Asia's "god of cycling" picked up his third title in five Asiards, having finished the

180-kilometer race in four hours, 14 minutes and 54.18 seconds, while the Korean was relegated to 19th place for swerving.

Takashi Miyazawa of Japan, who trailed Wong by 15/100 of a second, moved up to second spot and China's Zou Rongxi collected the bronze medal.

"I was a little nervous, but confident when waiting for the judgment," said Wong.

"The Korean's foul was quite obvious. But even if I got the silver, I'd still be satisfied with today's performance."

Wong, who won his first Asiad title at Bangkok 1998 and his second at Busan 2002, has since emerged as one of Hong Kong's most influential sports icons.

"I wasn't competing with the mindset that this is my last Asian Games, because that would have influenced by performance," said Wong, who also has an Asian Games bronze medal.

He admitted that he wasn't sure before the race if he still has the muscle to pull through over such a fearsome distance.

"I just did everything I could to be at my best before and during the competition," he said.

"Cycling is a collective event, and it's very hard to win because all your opponents keep their eye on you if you go in as the favorite."

Shen Jinkang, head coach of the Hong Kong cycling team, spoke highly of his star's performance.

"He did quite well today, and I

feel this was the toughest match for Wong, even harder than the track races at the world championships," said Shen.

"The road race requires courage and comprehensive skills to tackle various unexpected situations, and it's very physically demanding."

It also requires a little luck, which on Monday favored Wong instead of Park.

The Korean camp was quite vocal in expressing its belief that the punishment handed to its top racer was unfair, especially as it was decided by a panel made up largely of Chinese and Japanese judges. Several other riders in the event said it was a little harsh as maintaining a straight line in the race is not always easy.



EDMOND TANG / CHINA DAILY

**Wong Kam Po of Hong Kong raises his hand to protest a violation by Park Sung-baek of Korea at the finish line of the men's individual road race on Monday.**



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