

Sports News

# Saleh Muhammad puts up terrific performance at World Snooker Championship

'My only success in the second session was in the 13th frame. I made it 6-7 by winning this frame. But Advani was simply brilliant in the next frame. In his very first visit to the table he amassed a break of 135. It was amazing stuff really'

By Syed Khalid Mahmood

Pakistan's ace cueist Saleh Muhammad could not win the 2003 IBSF World Snooker Championship but he remained the most consistent performer of the two-week event staged in the Chinese port city of Jiangmen. The 31-year-old Saleh had reached the final after having triumphed in all of his previous 14 matches while his opponent, Indian teenager Pankaj Advani, had tasted defeat no less than twice in his 10 league matches.

Saleh, in great form, was supremely confident of pocketing the best of 21 frame final. But youth prevailed over experience and it was Advani, not Saleh, who took the crown.

Saleh, while talking to 'The News on Sunday' after his return to Karachi, admitted that he had run out of steam in the second session of the final which was dominated by the reigning Indian national champion.

"Advani did unsettle my game by forcing me to run all over the place. He hardly committed an error in the whole match. His plan was to make me tired. He was playing so well that I didn't get the opportunity to undo his plans," Saleh conceded.

"I had been drained out in the first session. Although the scoreline was 5-all I had run out of steam by the time the second session got underway which did not allow me to play my natural game. My chances of winning then only hinged on blunders to be committed by my opponent. But Advani was not in any mood to let go the opportunity. He was making most of every opening because it was his day," the new world number two observed.

"My only success in the second session was in the 13th frame. I had made it 6-7 by winning this frame. But Advani was simply brilliant in the next frame. In his very first visit to the table he amassed a break of 135. It was amazing stuff really," he recalled.

"I had secured 67-0 lead in the 16th frame but Advani made a clearance of 70 and the frame was snatched again from me. I was now trailing by 6-10 and I could read the writing on the wall. I knew before entering the 17th

frame that winning five frames on a trot was next to impossible in the prevailing conditions," Saleh revealed.

The 17th frame indeed proved to be the last one and Advani thoroughly deserved his 11-6 win. The frame scores of the final were 35-64, 7-79, 73-10, 66-56, 46-59, 87-13, 81-43, 71-13, 0-95, 15-93, 64-36, 78-33, 3-47, 135-0, 65-46, 70-67, 63-22.

"Advani played very well indeed with total confidence and good safety," commented Pakistan manager, Yousuf Suleman, at the end of the final. Saleh Muhammad had reached the final after winning all his 10 league matches and then four knock-out matches.

He had preserved his unbeaten record of ten wins in as many matches in Group D when he toppled Mei Xiwen of China in his last league fixture 4-2. Earlier he had registered victories over Tim English (Wales) 4-3, Tauriq Samsodien (South Africa) 4-0, Tang Jun (China) 4-3, Balazs Hamori (Hungary) 4-3, Alan Lin Tang Chi (Hong Kong), Roy Stalk (Netherlands) 4-1, Amarjargal (Mongolia) 4-0, James Misfud (Australia) 4-2 and Po Hsein Lee (Chinese Taipei) 4-1.

Phaithoon Phonbun of Thailand was the only other unbeaten cueist in the league matches. Phonbun was top seeded for the knock-out matches

because of better frame scores than Saleh, who was seeded second.

In the last 32, Saleh had outwitted Martin McCrudden of Ireland 5-3 while he demolished Issara Kachiwong of Thailand 5-1 in the pre-quarter-finals. He was equally ruthless while blasting Linang Wenbo of China 6-1 in the quarter-finals while he encountered some resistance from Mark Allen of Northern Ireland in the semi-finals but won it 8-5. It was only in the final that Saleh could not get things under control.

Meanwhile Pankaj Advani has now become the second Indian, after O B Agarwal, to have captured the world snooker champion. Saleh Muhammad would also have become the second Pakistani, after Muhammad Yousuf, had he clinched the title. Since he couldn't do it, Yousuf remains the only world snooker champion to be produced by Pakistan.

The World Snooker Championship was instituted in 1963 and its very second edition was held in Pakistan in 1966. Gary Owen of Wales had run away with the title in both these events.

David Taylor was the first Englishman to win this title when it was first held in Australia in 1968. Jonathan Barron of



Saleh Muhammad



Photo by M Ferooz Khan

England claimed the title when Scotland hosted it in 1970.

Ray Edmonds of England equalled Gary Owen's feat of winning the championship two times when the former successfully retained the title in 1974 after having first won it a couple of years ago.

The snooker glory returned to Wales when Doug Mourtjoy and Cliff Wilson emerged champions in 1976 and 1978 respectively while England's Jimmy White captured the crown in 1980.

Terry Parsons did it for Wales

again in 1982 but O B Agarwal of India won it in 1984. Paul Mifsud of Malta claimed the title in 1986 and 1988 while Darren Morgan of Wales took it in 1987.

James Wattana of Thailand became the world champion in 1988 while Ken Doherty and S O'Connor, both of them from Ireland, won the title in 1989 and 1990 respectively.

Nappodon Noppachorn of Thailand claimed the crown in 1991 while Neil Mosley of Malta did it in 1992. Triratanapradit of Thailand ran away with the title in

1993 when the contest was held in Pakistan. And the very next year the title came to Pakistan when Muhammad Yousuf did it in style in South Africa.

Sim-Ngam (Thailand), Stuart Bingham (England), Marco Fu (Hong Kong), Luke Simmonds (England), Ian Preece (Wales) and Stephen Maguire (Scotland) won the title in 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 respectively. The championship could not be staged in 2001 while the last year's title was won by Steve Mifsud of Australia.