

India beat Australia in absorbing battle

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KOLKATA, August 2: India rallied to prevail over formidable Australia in an enthralling match to emerge Group A champions and set up a semi-final clash with South Africa in the second Commonwealth Volleyball Championship on Wednesday.

Egged on by a raucous crowd, the hosts showed fine attacking flair to go past Australia 19-25, 25-21, 25-23, 27-25 and finish the group with an all-win record.

Australia, who finished Group runners up with three wins and one loss, will take on Pakistan for a place in the title round at the Netaji Indoor stadium.

The Indian defence initially looked sloppy with the blocking not being up to the mark, but the opening set reverse seemed to act as a wake-up call. The hosts lifted their game in the subsequent sets, playing flawlessly as the Kangaroos tied themselves in a web of errors.

The 103-minute battle gave the spectators their money's worth as both sides played aggressively, but in the end the Indians finished on top for maintaining a greater level of consistency.

For India, Sanjay Kumar and Skipper PS Srikanth led the turnaround, with the former gleaning 22 points to emerge as the top scorer of the match. Srikanth also collected 14 points, besides playing a big role in thwarting the opponent attacks.

The Aussies controlled the action in the opening set to open up a 16-10 lead at the second technical time out, and then maintained the lead to pocket the set in 20 minutes.

The complexion of the game changed in the second set, as the Indians established a 11-7 lead, but the visitors took four points in a row to restore parity at 11-11. The two teams went neck and neck till 17-17 before the Indians broke away to go ahead 21-18 and retained the momentum to take the set.

The third set was also a close affair as the rivals breathed down each other till 20-20. At that point, the boys from Down Under came up with erratic shots and the Indians seized the initiative to close the set in 26 minutes.

Down 1-2, the Australians began the fourth set on a positive note, opening up an early lead, but the by now buoyed-up hosts tied the score at 6-6.

The combatants ran each other close with the Indians on match point at 24-23. But Igor Yudin successfully blocked to save the blushes temporarily for the visitors.

The Indians finally won on their second match point as Sanjay Kumar 'killed' a high ball.

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