

SRM perform an encore in John memorial volleyball

T.N. RAGHU

CHENNAI, MARCH 29

SRM University retained the P. John memorial all-India volleyball title after seeing off Karnataka 25-15, 23-25, 25-19, 23-25, 15-9 in the final at the MRK Stadium here on Sunday. The defending champions shouldn't have allowed the match to reach the decider but they ultimately held their nerve to come out on top.

SRM deserve credit for making it two in a row in the absence of their talismanic player Angamuthu who is nursing a knee injury. The universal had stolen the thunder in the final last year against Indian Overseas Bank, one of the premier clubs in the country. The university team's collective strength proved too much for the coach-less Karnataka who entered the final only with

nine players.

Attacker M. Saravana Kumar was the man of the moment for the champions in the decider as he hit the bull's eye with his smart smashes. Setter A. Muthusamy also raised his game by mixing up his distribution judiciously. SRM were a tad lucky to make it 7-4 when a return from their libero seemed to have gone wide of the antenna. But referee Kangaraj insisted that the third touch was legal when Karnataka players disputed his decision vehemently.

Towering universal Reason B. Rebello waged a lone battle for Karnataka who had come to Chennai with a depleted squad. He threatened to upset the appercart of the home team in the fifth set with telling smashes but lacked support from other attacking players.



SRM University's A.S. Venkatesh (left) and S. Dinakaran (right) try to block a Karnataka smash in the final of the John memorial volleyball tournament on Sunday. —DC



SRM, champions of the P. John memorial all-India volleyball tournament. — DC

T. Sathriyan, the bedrock of SRM in the absence of Angamuthu, was in his element as the champions bolted to a splendid start. Blocker K. Ragul, too, was in the mood. There was no contest in the first set and the atmosphere was decidedly flat. SRM served better

and attacked imperiously to keep their opponents on the mat.

Karnataka pulled level on the back of Raison's smashes and Sravan Rao's blocks. There was also a marked improvement in their serving. The third set was a repeat of the first with SRM

pocketing it in no time. Karnataka never got off as a result of their erratic reception. But the match entered the decider following SRM's dismal show in the fourth. Muthusamy must shoulder some blame for feeding Sathriyan repeatedly, even though he

had the option of using Ragul in first tempo. The setter, however, redeemed himself with his excellent performance in the fifth set.

Maybe SRM wanted to entertain the holiday crowd for a little longer. It was a tournament of five sets for them as they played four deciders in five matches.

SRM coach S. Dakshinamoorthy was delighted with his boys' performance and called the title unexpected. "My primary target was topping our group in the league. I should congratulate my boys for going all the way. I feel playing a series of five sets was a good experience for them in dealing with pressure," he added.

RESULTS

Men: Final: SRM bt Karnataka 25-15, 23-25, 25-19, 23-25, 15-9. **3rd place playoff:** Western Railway bt Tamil Nadu Police 25-20, 25-22, 25-18.