

Helshan's double podium delight in Croatia

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Helshan Weerasinghe in doubles action with Tom Sfiligoj (ITTF picture)

Helshan Weerasinghe continued his rich vein of form by bagging gold and silver medals at the Croatia Junior & Cadet Open.

The Tonbridge youngster triumphed in the Junior Doubles with his partner, Tom Sfiligoj of Slovenia, and was beaten in the final of the Junior Singles in Varazdin.

It follows hot on the heels of winning his first ITTF Junior Circuit title in the singles at the Funchal Junior and Cadet Open in Madeira earlier this month.

The 17-year-old was seeded 10th in the singles but reached the semi-finals with relatively few alarms – though he did have to come from 2-1 down to beat seventh seed Bence Majoros of Hungary 4-2 in the last 16.

In the semi-finals, he beat ninth seed Alexandru Manole of Romania 4-1 (11-7, 11-8, 2-11, 11-3, 11-7) to set up a final clash against second seed Andreas Levenko of Austria.

And although he took the first two ends 11-8, 11-2, his opponent mounted a comeback and shaded the next four closely-fought games to seal a 4-2 victory (11-8, 11-2, 7-11, 8-11, 10-12, 9-11).

"I'm playing pretty well and it was a good tournament to do well in," said Helshan. "With my seeding, I was expected to get to the last 16 but no further.

"I think probably preparation was the key. Straight after Funchal, I arrived back into training and trained well. I got there (Croatia) the day before and had some multi-ball and practised with a Belgian player, so the preparation was key."

In the doubles, Weerasinghe and Sfiligoj were in top form, belying their status as 15th seeds to storm through to the final, dropping only two ends on the way. Among their victims were the second seeds, Ingemar Peter and Alexander Valuch of Slovakia, who they beat 3-1 in the last 16.

And they maintained that form in the final to take the title by beating fifth seeds Majoros and Mate Bruckner (HUN) 11-7, 11-5, 13-11.

"I know Tom's brother quite well and he asked if I wanted to partner Tom, so I said 'why not?' and we just clicked immediately," said Helshan.

"His game was perfect to complement mine and we beat the second seeds in the second round and it was all upwards from there."

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