

Doubles, a lucrative option

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Year-end figures of top-50 badminton earners based on the prize money awarded during the 2013 season for all Badminton World Federation tournaments point to a startling trend that ought to shake up the thinking of India's shuttle-playing community, or at least recalibrate their priorities.

The list compiled by the website Badzine and released at the start of 2014, has 6 doubles specialists among badminton's top 10 individual prize-earners, with as many as 13 of the first-20 plying their trade in the pairs event. A surprising 60 per cent of the 50 top grossers making that list - calculating only tournament prize-cheques, and not endorsements or money earned from private leagues - globe-trot the international circuit playing doubles or mixed doubles or both.

It might not be such a bad idea, financially, then, for Indian youngsters to have the likes of V Diju, Jwala Gutta and Ashwini Ponappa as role models when planning their careers, alongside PV Sindhu and Saina Nehwal.

The list revealed by Badzine has men's singles long-time World No 1 Lee Chong Wei topping the charts with US\$ 292,540, but the top-earning women's player happens to be Chinese Yunlei Zhao, who collected US\$ 167,195. Zhao's mixed doubles partner Nan Zhang is placed at No 4 (US\$ 142,535) while Korea's ever-consistent men's doubles practitioner Lee Yong Dae (US\$ 141,445) makes it three of the five richest earners, playing the split event.

While singles carries plenty of glory and glamour in badminton, the sport has managed to keep doubles on a near-equal footing as far as the percentage of the prize-pie goes. Coupled with the organisers' insistence on equitable distribution and the fact that historically doubles has not been too far behind singles in terms of priorities in China, Korea and Thailand, the fact that Danish Christinna Pedersen (US\$ 127,596) is Europe's top-earner and doubles' Chris Adcock is England's best, points to the three events being as lucrative as it is playing singles in badminton.

The all-important caveat is that a doubles specialist needs to maintain consistency of a Top-8 ranking or result (or quarterfinals in tournaments) to pocket those cushy sums on the tour, for the same pairings end up lining up on the decisive weekend pay-days and split the spoils among themselves. Singles boasts of greater depth, and a smaller share of the prize kitty. Still, with Saina Nehwal (38th at US\$ 43,4080) and women's World champion Ratchanok Intanon (28th at US\$ 55,650), perhaps youngsters can eye the doubles route to financial comfort in badminton.

(Shivani is an assistant editor based in Mumbai)

shivani.naik@expressindia.com