

Vaishali triumphs, to fight for world crown



R. Vaishali (in picture) outplayed Kateryna Lagno in the final round. (X)

Paphos (Cyprus): Grandmaster R. Vaishali regained her composure at a crucial juncture and staged a fine comeback to outplay Kateryna Lagno in the final round, sealing victory to be crowned the outright champion of the Women's Candidates Tournament, which concluded here on Wednesday.

Vaishali, long seen in the shadow of her younger sibling R. Praggnanandhaa, has now carved her own path to the biggest stage in women's chess, earning the right to take on China's Ju Wenjun in the World Championship match later this year.

On the biggest day of her career, Vaishali played almost the perfect game. She

never allowed Lagno a sniff. What made it even better was that she came into this game on the back of scoring just half a point in the last two rounds.

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While Vaishali had to do the job against Lagno, she also needed a favour from a countrywoman, which she got in the nick of time.

Divya Deshmukh held Bibisara Assaubayeva to a draw in the final game. Assaubayeva came into the final round level on points with Vaishali, and her draw meant Vaishali's win, with a total of 8.5 points, was decisive in the tournament.

In the Open section, Javokhir Sindarov played out a draw with China's Wei Yi.

The Uzbek grandmaster had clinched victory in the Candidates Tournament with a round to spare on Tuesday, when he drew with Dutchman Anish Giri to set up a World Championship match against India's Gukesh Dommaraju.

India's Praggnanandhaa signed off with a draw against American star Hikaru Nakamura.

Anish Giri finished a clear second, 1.5 points behind Sindarov, after defeating Germany's Matthias Bluebaum, while Fabiano Caruana also notched up a win against Andrey Esipenko.