

Praggu scripts 'biggest triumph'

Oslo: Grandmaster Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa became the first Indian to win the prestigious Norway Chess title with a final-round victory over Germany's Vincent Keymer here, capping off a brilliant campaign in style.

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Praggu, who began the final round in second place with 15 points on Friday, delivered when it mattered the most, securing a classical win worth three full points to finish on 18 points and clinch one of the most coveted trophies in elite chess.

In doing so, the 20-year-old Chennai player achieved a feat that had eluded even Viswanathan Anand and reigning world champion Dommaraju

Gukesh, since the tournament's inception in 2013.

Competing in Norway Chess for only the second time, Praggu endured a slow start in the elite six-player field before gathering momentum in the second half of the event to secure four wins on the trot.

His campaign was highlighted by defeating seven-time Norway Chess champion and World No. 1 Magnus Carlsen twice in classical chess. As Gukesh fell out of contention in the closing stages, Praggu ensured that India's challenge remained alive, ultimately carrying it all the way to the title.

The result was made possible after Wesley So of the US, who led the standings with 15.5 points heading into the final round, was held to a draw



Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa gives autographs to children after winning the Norway Chess title in Oslo on Friday. (PTI)

in his classical game against Alireza Firouzja, sending their contest into an Armageddon tie-break.

That outcome opened the door for Praggu, who knew that a classical victory over Keymer would propel him to the top of the standings and secure the title.

Praggu revealed after the match that a pep talk from his mother (Nagalakshmi) back home in Chennai had lifted his spirits. "She told me that June would bring good luck," he

said with a smile — a prediction that came true.

"I was speaking to my mother on June 1, before Alireza's game, and she was telling me, 'It's a new month, you'll play well!'" Praggu said.

"I think this is the biggest triumph of my career... Also stronger in terms of live average rating. I think, because you have like some 2600s (Elo rating) in Wijk Aan Zee (Tata Steel Chess tournament). But here it's just the top players," Praggu said.

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