

What to WATCH

STAR SPORTS 3
 ICC U-19s World Cup
 Super League Quarterfinal-3
 Bangladesh v South Africa
 Live from 2:00pm
SONY SIX & TEN 2
 Australian Open
 Live from 6:00am and 2:30pm



Austria's Dominic Thiem spreads his arms in joy after beating World No. 1 Rafael Nadal of Spain in the fourth quarterfinal of the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. (Inset) Nadal, who was looking for a record-equalling 20 Grand Slam titles, hides his face in frustration. PHOTO: AFP

Thiem leads Next Gen into semis

Dominic Thiem shocked top seed Rafael Nadal and Alexander Zverev ousted former champion Stan Wawrinka as tennis's young pretenders stole a march on the old guard to reach the Australian Open semifinals on Wednesday.

Austria's Thiem, 26, beat Nadal 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 7-6 (8/6) -- his first win in six attempts at Grand Slams, including two French Open finals -- to end the 33-year-old's bid to equal Roger Federer's record 20 Major titles.

Earlier Zverev, 22, beat 2014 champion Wawrinka, 34, to go into a semifinal with Thiem, meaning that one of them will reach Sunday's final against Roger Federer or Novak Djokovic,

who have won 12 of the last 14 Australian Open titles.

Thiem had Nadal's measure in the first two sets and he recovered from dropping the third to win the fourth-set tie-breaker, getting off the floor after falling to win one point and enjoying some luck from the net cord to set up the third and decisive match point.

"I was lucky in the right situation -- the net cord was really on my side," Thiem said. "But it's necessary because he is one of the greatest of all time. You need some luck to beat him."

Several young players have been knocking on the door of the Big Three of Nadal, Federer and Djokovic, and either Thiem or Zverev will get a chance to kick it open in Sunday's final.

Germany's Zverev rallied from a set down to halt three-time Major-

winner Wawrinka 1-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 and reach his first Grand Slam semi-final.

Big things have been tipped for Zverev since he burst into the top 10 in 2017, but he said that until now he has been pushing himself too hard at the Majors.

"I was doing things in a way too professional way. I was not talking to anybody. I wasn't going out with friends. I wasn't having dinner. I was just really almost too focused."

"I changed that a little bit this week... maybe this is how it should happen," he added.

Wimbledon champion Simona Halep has also benefited from a more relaxed approach as she swept aside Anett Kontaveit 6-1, 6-1 to reach the semifinals without dropping a set.

The Romanian fourth seed, who is spending time away from tennis

between matches, said she was finally feeling comfortable on the biggest stage.

"I just feel more confident and I feel like I'm able to do it," said Halep, who is going after her third Major title. "It's just a feeling that you don't see this trophy as impossible anymore."

Halep's semifinal is against fellow two-time Slam-winner Garbine Muguruza, who continued her impressive return to form by beating Russian 30th seed Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 7-5, 6-3.

"I'm excited to play my first semifinal here," said the unseeded former world number one, who won the 2016 French Open and 2017 Wimbledon.

"I've known her (Halep) for quite a long time so it's going to be a tough match," she added.

Trezeguet sends Villa into final

Trezeguet struck deep into stoppage time to send Aston Villa into their first League Cup final for a decade with a 2-1 win over Leicester on Tuesday to progress to Wembley 3-2 on aggregate.

Matt Targett's early opener put Villa in front, but Leicester enjoyed the majority of possession and chances and finally found a way past Orjan Nyland when Kelechi Iheanacho levelled 18 minutes from time.

However, Villa snatched victory and a trip to Wembley on March 1 to face Manchester City or Manchester United when Trezeguet connected perfectly with fellow Egyptian Ahmed Elmohamady's cross three minutes into added time.

Defeat ends Leicester boss Brendan Rodgers' run of winning 31 straight domestic cup ties after a dominant spell at Celtic and he will rue his side's inability to turn their dominance of

the game into goals.

The visitors started with top scorer Jamie Vardy on the bench as he was eased back into action after a glute injury, but the Foxes still blasted out of the traps.

Iheanacho was denied in the first of a string of big saves by Nyland in the Villa goal inside the first three minutes.

James Maddison then had a hat-trick of efforts, two of which brought saves from Nyland.

However, it was Villa who struck first when the impressive Jack Grealish teed up Targett to fire across Kasper Schmeichel 12 minutes in.

Nyland may not even have played if Villa's new number one Pepe Reina had been fit to play, but the Norwegian was inspired as he then produced his best save of the night to turn Youri Tielemans's piledriver onto the bar.

Maddison was furious moments later when he saw another effort repelled by the arm of Marvelous Nakamba.

Mbwana Samatta was making his Villa debut after a £8.5 million (\$11 million) switch from Genk, but his first experience of Villa Park is not one the Tanzanian will remember fondly as he somehow failed to turn home another brilliant Grealish delivery early in the second half.

That could have proved the knockout blow for Leicester, but instead they were very much back in the tie when an explosive burst from Harvey Barnes teed up Iheanacho to finish.

Jonny Evans and Maddison then came close to putting Rodgers' men in front.

But just when both sides seemed to be preparing for extra-time, Leicester were hit with a sucker punch when Elmohamady's cross was volleyed into the bottom corner by his compatriot.

Trezeguet had to be hauled from the field by Villa security personnel after he was mobbed in a pitch invasion after the final whistle as the home fans celebrated wildly.



Aston Villa players mob their Egyptian midfielder Trezeguet, who scored a 90th-minute winner against Leicester City in their semifinal second leg of the League Cup at Villa Park in Birmingham on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

PDB clinch volleyball title

Power Development Board (PDB) clinched the title of Bangabandhu Popular Life Premier Division Volleyball League, beating Titus Club in five sets in a thrilling final at the Shaheed Nur Hossain National Volleyball Stadium in Paltan yesterday.

PDB twice fought back from a set down, winning the fixture by 23-25, 25-20, 25-23, 24-26, 15-12 points.

Bangladesh Ansar and VDP finished third after beating Bangladesh Police SC in 3-1 sets in the place-deciding match.

Horosit Biswas of PDB was adjudged as the best attacker while Hari Hujur of Titus Club and Rubel of Ansar were adjudged as the best setter and best defender respectively.

Milan set up semi against Juve

AC Milan will meet Juventus in the Italian Cup semifinals after beating Torino 4-2 in an enthralling encounter on Tuesday to continue their Zlatan Ibrahimovic-inspired revival.

Extra-time goals from substitutes Hakan Calhanoglu and Ibrahimovic sealed passage into the last four for a Milan side who have been reawakened by the return of the Swede last month.

They will be relishing the tie with the Italian champions, who thumped Roma 3-0 in their quarterfinal match last week.

The superstar striker's second goal since returning to Milan came on a night the club honoured Milan fan Kobe Bryant -- who spent much of his childhood in Italy -- with the message "Legends never die" on the San Siro big screens.

Milan, who are still down in eighth in Serie A, have now won five on the

had held the hosts at bay.

The hosts had dominated most of the match but had found themselves behind to two Gleison Bremer goals with 19 minutes left after Giacomo Bonaventura had given Milan the lead in the 12th minute.

Ibrahimovic missed two chances to snatch the tie after Calhanoglu levelled, first somehow shooting over the bar from inches out, then seeing his smart shot well pushed away by Sirigu.

Sirigu was on top form again in extra time when he pulled off a superb double save, first charging out to stop Theo Hernandez before quickly getting up to keep out the rebound.

However he couldn't stop Calhanoglu putting his side ahead early in the second half of extra-time, his powerful shot escaping the Italian stopper's grasp before Ibrahimovic slotted home Leao's neat lay-off two minutes later, ending Torino's resistance.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored in the 108th minute as Milan beat Torino 4-2 to reach the semifinal of Coppa Italia on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

GENERAL

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SACKED A DAY AFTER BECOMING BEST COACH

Fortuna Duesseldorf, who are bottom of the Bundesliga, on Wednesday sacked Friedhelm Funkel, just a day after he received a 'coach of the year' award. On Tuesday, Fortuna tweeted "congratulations" to Funkel for receiving the accolade from the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. However, the 66-year-old was sacked less than 24 hours later in the wake of Sunday's 3-0 loss to mid-table Leverkusen -- their 12th defeat in 19 league games. Duesseldorf are three points from safety and in a bid to avoid relegation former Manchester City striker Uwe Roesler, who last coached Swedish side Malmo, has been appointed head coach. The 51-year-old, who played for City in the 1990s, will be in charge for Saturday's home game against Eintracht Frankfurt, who shocked league leaders RB Leipzig last weekend. -- AFP



Premier League to start on Feb 13

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday decided to start the 12th edition of top-tier professional league from February 13 to accommodate Abahani's home and away matches of the AFC Cup qualifying playoffs.

The Bangladesh Premier League was originally scheduled to start from January 30, but the professional football league committee (PFLC), in an emergency meeting at the BFF house yesterday, decided that the league will kick off on February 13.

The meeting also decided to hold the 13-team league at seven venues across the country, with the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla and MA Aziz Stadium in Chattogram added to last year's roster while the Shaheed Bulu Stadium in Noakhali being scrapped.

"We sat with the participating clubs after the Bangabandhu Gold Cup. Since Abahani have AFC Cup commitment, the clubs reached consensus regarding deferment of the league, which will feature 13 clubs starting from February 13," Abdus Salam Murshedy, the chairman of PFLC said after the meeting.

Abahani will play the home match of the prequalifying playoffs against Maziya S&RC of Maldives in Dhaka on February 5 before playing away to Male on February 12.

The meeting also decided to increase the number of registration of foreign players from four to five, allowing a foreign player to be replaced by another to accommodate all five in the match-squad.

Last year, the number of registration for foreign players was four.

This has been done, according to Murshedy, in face of demand from the clubs to give cushion in case of injuries to the foreign players.

Federer fined 3,000 dollars

REUTERS, Undated

Roger Federer was fined \$3,000 for using an audible obscenity during his Australian Open quarterfinal victory over American Tennys Sandgren, tournament organisers said on Wednesday.

The Swiss was handed a code violation for swearing in the third set of Tuesday's match after the lineswoman reported Federer to Serbian chair umpire Marijana Veljovic.

Federer later clarified that he had sworn in a "a mix" of languages and said he was frustrated by the way he received the on-court warning.

"Clearly she speaks mixed. Didn't know that. Next time I got to check the (language skills of the) lines-people," the 20-times Grand Slam champion said.

"Honestly, to be frustrated at one point... I think it's normal.

"I found it a bit tough. It's not like I'm known to throw around words and whatever. It's not like the whole stadium heard it either."

McEnroe, Navratilova apologise

Tennis legends John McEnroe and Martina Navratilova apologised on Wednesday for breaking Australian Open protocols after their on-court protest targeting controversial Australian great Margaret Court.

The two Americans said sorry after unfurling a banner calling for a stadium named after Court -- criticised over her deeply conservative views -- to be renamed 'Evonne Goolagong Arena' after the three-time Australian Open winner.

But they did not row back on their demand concerning Margaret Court Arena.

"I got in trouble, I am sorry I broke protocol," Navratilova said on the Tennis Channel. "I had no idea there was this kind

of protocol.

"Had I known, I would have done it differently. I would have still tried to make my statement, which is that you name buildings after not what people did on the court, but also off the court, the whole body of work."

McEnroe also said he wasn't aware of the rules governing credential-holders.

"Admittedly I was never one to study the rule book carefully or, for that matter, even at times abide by the rules," McEnroe said in a statement, according to ESPN.

"In this case, I was not aware of the Tennis Australia rules and protocol for issuing credentials. For that I apologise to Tennis Australia and recognise and appreciate the great job they have done to make the Australian Open a great event for the fans, players and myself."