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Hardest loss

AFP, London



is not about to give up his world number one status to his great rival.

"It is probably my hardest loss by far, there is not much harder than this right now," the despondent Swiss star admitted after losing one of the greatest Grand Slam finals 9-7 in the fifth set after four hours and 48 minutes of extraordinary drama on the All England Club's Centre Court.

Having being part of a final that will rank alongside the great Bjorn Borg/John McEnroe classic of 1980 provided little in the way of solace for Federer, who was denied the opportunity to surpass Borg's run of five consecutive titles.

"It is always nice to be part of great matches. Later on in life I will look back on it as a great match but right now there is not much of a feelgood factor or anything positive about it," he said ruefully.

Federer, 26, was gracious in his praise for the performance of Nadal, who had threatened to repeat his straight sets win in last month's French Open final after claiming the first two sets here.

But his bitterness at losing his Wimbledon crown was reflected in a gripe about the fact that the match, which was twice interrupted for rain, was finished in rapidly fading light.

"I almost could not see who I was playing at the end, it was not funny," Federer said, revealing that he would have asked for play to be suspended for the night if he had

broken back to level the match at 8-8 in the final set.

"It would have been brutal for the fans, for the media and for us to come back tomorrow but it is also tough on me to lose the biggest tournament in the world because of a loss of light."

Federer could console himself with the fact that he played, in patches at least, as well as he had done in any of the five previous finals here.

But the relentless quality of Nadal's resistance was underlined by the fact that the world number one was able to convert just one of the 13 breakpoints he generated over the course of the five sets, and was hustled into a total of 52 unforced errors, almost twice his opponent's tally.

"I thought I played well overall but I missed too many chances in the first couple of sets," he confessed. "I was struggling with the wind a little bit."

"On some of the break points Rafa played great, on others I played poorly. I should have decided much more what I really wanted to do but Rafa keeps you thinking and that is what great players do."

"I was not able to break him in last three sets but I pushed him right to the end."

Despite Nadal's triumphs here and at Roland Garros, Federer will remain world number one for now - and he did not take kindly to a suggestion that he should be preparing to hand that position over to his Spanish rival.

"You write what you want," he snapped. "I'm going to try and win the Olympics and the US Open and then we can talk again."

Federer did not let his reign at Wimbledon end without an almighty scrap.

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WORTHY WORRIORS: World number one Roger Federer (L) congratulates his conqueror Rafael Nadal after the 'final of the century' at The All England Tennis Club in London on Sunday.

Greatest win

AFP, London



that dethroned All England Club king Roger Federer was still the best player in the world.

Nadal shattered Federer's dream of a record sixth successive Wimbledon title with a 6-4, 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-7 (8/10), 9-7 triumph in the longest final in the tournament's history to add a first title here to his four French Opens.

"He's still the number one. He's still the best. He's still the five-time champion here. Right now I have just one," said Nadal, the first Spanish men's winner since Manolo Santana in 1966.

Despite losing what will comfortably be regarded as the greatest final in Grand Slam history, Federer will remain the world number one for the 231st week when the new rankings are released on Monday.

Nadal will stay at number two

ROAD TO GLORY

First Round: bt Andreas Beck (GER) 6-4, 6-4, 7-6 (7/0)

Second Round: bt Ernests Gulbis (LAT) 5-7, 6-2, 7-6 (7/2), 6-3

Third Round: bt Nicolas Kiefer (GER) 2-7, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2, 6-3

Fourth Round: bt Mikhail Youzhny (RUS) 1-7, 6-3, 6-3, 6-1

Quarterfinals: bt Andy Murray (GBR) 6-3, 6-2, 6-4

Semifinals: bt Rainer Schuettler (GER) 6-1, 7-6 (7/3), 6-4

Final: bt Roger Federer (SUI) 1-6, 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-7 (8/10)

for the 155th week.

But after his ruthless demolition of Federer four weeks ago in the French Open final to claim a fourth successive Paris crown, and becoming only the third man to win Roland Garros and Wimbledon in the same year, it is the 22-year-old Spaniard who is now widely seen as the world's top player.

He ended Federer's 65-match, six-year winning streak on grass, a significant psychological blow with the Swiss still without a French Open title to add to his 12 Grand Slam trophy collection.

"It's more of a surprise to win here than the French," admitted Nadal.

"It's my most emotional win and probably the best."

Nadal went through emotional turmoil in the four hour, 48 minute final where he wasted three match points before celebrating his victory by clambering over the scoreboard and into the Royal Box where he was warmly embraced by Spanish Crown Prince Felipe.

Federer had his opportunities but could only convert one of 13 break points while sending down 52 unforced errors to the world number two's 27.

Nadal also shattered the myth that Spaniards don't like to play on grass.

"I love playing on this surface. Sometimes if your opponent serves very well it can be a little boring," said Nadal of a final which finished in the gloom of Centre Court at 21:16 local time (20:56 GMT) after two rain delays.

He also admitted that he felt for Federer after pulling off his 12th win in 18 meetings with the world number one, especially after losing the last two finals to the Swiss here.

"I know how tough it is to lose a

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Did U Know?

The first edition of the Asia Cup cricket was held in 1984 in Sharjah, UAE. India won the title.



Venus Williams

(American tennis star)
"To match Martina (Navratilova) - that would be the ultimate. It is not easy - her career spanned three decades and I'm not sure if I have that much time. But if I did I would definitely dream of that."
After winning the fifth Wimbledon singles title on Saturday.

BCB picks 24 for U-16 camp

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday named 24 players for the Under-16 training camp.

The selected players have been asked to report on July 10 at 5pm at the BKSP. The training programme will continue till July 17.

The players are Ashik-ul Alam, Soumya Sarker, Anamul Haque, Zakaria Masud, Asif Hassan, Dewan Sabbir Ahmed, Mohammad Sentu, Mohammad Habibullah, Mohammad Shakil, Sumit Chowdhury, Imamul Hossain, Jayanta Das, Kazi Nurul Hassan, SM Ahmadul Kabir, Arif Reza, Mohammad Mamun Hossain, Sayem Alam Rizvi, Shahnaj Ahmed, Abu Jayed, AM Rupu, Nuruzzaman, Faizan Khan, Mohammad Rokon and Didar Hossain.

Standbys: Mehdi Hassan, Rakim Ahmed and Ikhted Nazeef Ahmed.

FEDERATION CUP BFF plans qualifiers

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) will have to hold the Federation Cup in two phases in the wake of increasing teams for the season's curtain raiser tournament.

Already ten teams have sent their entries and another one has showed interest to play in the tournament, which kicks off July 31, beside the 11 automatic choices for the final phase from the B. League.

Although the B. League committee, which also looks after the Federation Cup, had invited four services teams to join the professional league clubs in the initial stage, four Senior Division teams, BKSP and Rajshahi's Diganta Prasari have officially wanted to enrol.

In addition, the committee, headed by BFF's senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedi, will now have to consider Bangladesh Customs' appeal to enrol.

"With the number of teams increasing, we have no other alternative but to go for qualifying rounds," said Salam yesterday.

"Customs are not affiliated with the BFF but as the Federation Cup is an invitational tournament, there is no legal barrier to include them," opined the former national striker.

"We are considering a 16-team final round and in that case, five teams will qualify through the first phase on knockout basis," he said adding that the tournament com-

mittee has yet to finalise the format of the qualifying phase. "We can't organise too many matches in the first phase because it will be time consuming."

"The 16 teams will be split into four groups in the finals with all the group winners making it to the semifinals."

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Pinning hopes on A tour

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Chief selector Rafiqul Alam believes that the national players will make most of the A team's tour of England ahead of a tough series in Australia.

Tamim Iqbal, Nazimuddin, Rokibul Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mosharrar Hossain, Sajidul Islam and Dollar Mahmud will fly to England tomorrow to replace Imrul Kayes, Sahagir Hossain, Nadif Chowdhury, Suhrawardi Shuvo,

Mahbubul Alam, Arafat Sunny and Farhad Hossain who are to return home after the ongoing 3-day match against England Under-19s.

All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan is likely to fly for England on July 11 after completion of his HSC examinations. The selectors are looking forward to see Shakib shine in the tour after being out of cricket for more than three months.

"I think it's a very important tour because we have no domestic competition or any international commitment before going to Australia. Hopefully the players will

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Kayes leads A team's charge

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A rode on an Imrul Kayes half-century to reach 115 for four against England Under-19s before rain stopped the second day's proceedings of the three-day match at the Hazlegrave Ground in Loughborough yesterday.

The entire first day's play was washed out due to rain.

The second-string Bangladesh side won the toss and decided to bat first but right-arm pacer James Harris gave the home side an early breakthrough by removing captain Zunaed Siddiqui for four.

Rajin Saleh joined Kayes to add 46 runs for the second wicket stand to repair the damage before right-arm pacer Ben Sanderson dismissed Rajin for 16. Sanderson also picked up the wicket of Nadif Chowdhury, who made 12.

Opener Kayes struck 62 off 104 balls with seven fours and a six before being trapped in front by pacer Ian Saxelby.

School chess from today

SPORTS REPORTER

The 10th Standard Chartered School Chess tournament will start today at the federation hall-room.

About 200 boys and girls including sixteen students from India and two from Nepal will take

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Aussies' rare sweep

Cricket

AFP, Basseterre

Mitchell Johnson starred with the ball, following a strong batting performance, as Australia completed a rare ODI series sweep in the Caribbean, when they cruised to a 169-run victory in the fifth and final ODI against West Indies on Sunday.

Johnson collected five wickets for 29 runs from 7.5 overs, as Australia successfully defended a formidable target total of 342, when they dismissed West Indies for 172 in 39.5 overs.

Johnson formalised the result,

when he had Fidel Edwards caught at fine leg fending away a short, rising ball to send another fair-sized, strongly partisan, weekend crowd home disappointed.

The victory -- Australia's largest against West Indies -- meant they became only the third team to sweep an ODI series in the Caribbean.

Australia won the opening match by 84 runs in St. Vincent, the rain-affected second ODI by 63 runs under the Duckworth-Lewis Method, and the third ODI last Sunday by seven wickets in Grenada, as well as the fourth ODI last Friday by one run here.

Previously, South Africa and Pakistan were the two sides that

achieved ODI series sweeps in the Caribbean.

They both accomplished the feat three years ago, when the Proteas won all five of their matches in a bilateral series, and the Pakistanis won all three in theirs.

Australia, choosing to bat on a hard, easy-paced Warner Park pitch, had amassed 341 for eight from their allocation of 50 overs -- a record total against West Indies in an ODI.

Shawn Findlay, playing in only his second ODI, was the top scorer for West Indies with 59 and long-standing fellow left-hander Shivnarine Chanderpaul sup

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Australia fast bowler Brett Lee (L) hands a wicket to Mitchell Johnson as they celebrate their victory against West Indies in the fifth and final one-day international at Warner Park in Saint Kitts on Sunday.

Olympics leapfrog cricket in India

AFP, New Delhi

India face the four-yearly dilemma of watching their favourite sport cricket or switching to the Olympics, and this time the Beijing extravaganza appears to be winning.

The Olympics clash with India's cricket tour of Sri Lanka with the iconic Sachin Tendulkar needing just 172 runs to overtake West Indian Brian Lara as the most prolific Test batsman.

Indians can't live without cricket but the younger generation, grown on a steady diet of live world-class

sporting action on their television screens, regard the Olympics as a must-watch.

A recent poll conducted by one of the Games sponsors found that almost 70 percent of city-bred Indians will closely follow the action in Beijing even as the cricket goes on in Sri Lanka.

"We may be a one-sport nation but it will be wrong to assume the new generation only follows cricket," said veteran sports writer Vijay Lokapally.

"They understand what the Olympics is all about and won't allow just cricket to dominate their mindset. You can't fool this generation."

It does not matter that India's returns from past Olympics have been minimal.

The last time India won an Olympic gold medal was in hockey at the west-boycotted Moscow Games in 1980. This time, the eight-time champions have not even qualified for the Games.

India has just four individual medals, the last three coming in each of the previous three editions.

The country is pinning its hopes on shooters, archers, boxers and tennis veterans to deliver a medal, a prospect that excites viewers as much as Tendulkar's impending record.

"It will be great if Tendulkar goes past Lara but his record will be broken one day by someone else," said sports enthusiast Pritam Sinha. "But an Olympic medal is for keeps and carries immense value."

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Street cleaners ride past a demolished construction site covered with a billboard showing Olympic mascots on Monday in Beijing, the host city for the Summer Olympic Games starting on August 8.