



PHOTO: AFP

Britain's Andy Murray celebrates his semifinal win over Spaniard David Ferrer at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Friday. Fifth seed Murray reached his second straight Australian Open final with a 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-1, 7-6 (7/2) win.

Murray fights into final

Sets up showdown against Djokovic

AFP, Melbourne

Andy Murray recovered from a set down against David Ferrer Friday to set up an Australian Open final against Novak Djokovic, where he will aim to break Britain's 75-year men's Grand Slam drought.

After a slow start, Murray won 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-1, 7-6 (7/2) to advance to his second straight Australian final, as he aims to go one better than last year's straight sets loss to Roger Federer.

Sunday's title match will be the British fifth seed's third Grand Slam final overall as he seeks to breakthrough for his first major trophy.

He is bidding to become the first British man to win a Grand Slam since Fred Perry in 1936. Perry was also the last British player to win the Australian Open, in 1934.

Last year Murray was the first British man since John Lloyd in 1977 to play in

an Australian Open final.

"He's an unbelievable athlete, he's an unbelievable competitor, he works so hard, he's in great shape and I was expecting an unbelievably tough match and I got it," Murray said of Ferrer.

"It was great that I managed to come through but he's such a tough player to play against.

"The conditions are very different in the evening than during the day and I played my last two matches during the day.

"He was dictating all the points at the start and in the second set I started to go for my shots a bit more and it paid off."

Murray extended his current winning streak to nine matches and dropped only his second set of the tournament against the tenacious Ferrer.

Ferrer was playing in his second Grand Slam semi-final after taking advantage of an injured Rafael Nadal to win their quarterfinal in straight sets.

Ferrer made Murray work for every point and kept him on court for 3hr 46min, leaving the Scot headed straight for an ice bath as he seeks to recover for Sunday's final.

The Spaniard's extraordinary fitness levels gave him the edge in a physical first set full of long, lung-busting rallies.

Ferrer was broken in the seventh game but broke straight back and broke the Scot again to take the opening set in 46 draining minutes.

Murray had a set point in the 10th game of the second set but Ferrer doggedly held him off and both exchanged breaks before the set went into a tie-breaker.

Ferrer played a dreadful tiebreak with three volley errors for Murray to level the match on the third of his six set points.

Murray made a strategic mid-match adjustment by better positioning himself on court and taking a more aggressive approach.

Roles reversed for Kim

Faces Li in final today

AFP, Melbourne

Kim Clijsters will find herself cast in the role of villain for one of the few times in her career as she bids to prevent Li Na's Australian Open fairytale from having the perfect ending.

Universally liked by fellow players and adored by Australian sports fans, the Belgian world number three would normally expect to go into Saturday's final with the crowd firmly behind her.

But China's Li has won thousands of hearts of minds on her way to the decider with a combination of her tenacious play on the court and her disarmingly frank and humorous interviews off it.

And she seems certain to have the backing of many of the 15,000 fans on the Rod Laver Arena when she steps out for the most important match of her life.

The 28-year-old Li scrapped her way into the final with a superb three-set win over world number one Caroline Wozniacki Thursday, saving a match point in the second set before reeling in her younger opponent 3-6, 7-5, 6-3.

Until the semifinal Li had not dropped a set as she dominated her matches, but she showed against Wozniacki that she has the mental fortitude to dig deep when it was needed.

The potential impact of a Li win cannot be underestimated.

Li's success at Melbourne in 2010, when she and Zheng Jie both made the semifinals, ensured enormous

publicity for the sport in the world's most populous nation.

She said making the final would only increase tennis's popularity.

"I think maybe because now I am in the final, maybe many young players or children will see me and think: 'Maybe one day we can do the same or even better than her'," Li said.

"So I think we can do even better and I feel that more people will come and watch, more people will pay attention."

In contrast to Li's smooth sailing, Clijsters has had a mixed run to the final, opening in a blaze of glory as she beat Dinara Safina 6-0, 6-0 before struggling against the unheralded Alize Cornet and Ekaterina Makarova.

However she came good as she defeated Vera Zvonareva in Thursday's semifinal 6-3, 6-3, later declaring that it was the best she had played all week.

Li and Clijsters have met

six times previously, with Clijsters holding a 4-2 advantage. But just two weeks ago in the Sydney International final, Li won 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 after being 5-0 down in the first set.

"I think she's a good player," Clijsters said, remembering the Sydney final.

"I think we're very similar type of players, I think we have a lot of things in common on the court.

"She played extremely well to get back, and was very focused and determined and just hit some incredible shots out there."

Clijsters said there was much to admire in Li's game, with her opponent having no obvious weaknesses.

"Not just the mental side of it, but also I don't think that she has a very big weakness on the groundstrokes," she said.

"She has a good, steady serve and maybe that's where she's a little better than me, the consistency

with the serve."

Clijsters, a triple US Open champion, reached the Australian Open final in 2004, when she was beaten by countrywoman Justine Henin.

She will be playing in her eighth Grand Slam final, while it will be Li's first.

The Belgian lost her first four major finals, and she said it was hard to know how Li would respond to the big occasion.

"Everybody reacts a little differently in those kind of situations," she said.

"She's played big matches, she's a little bit older and been on tour, so it's not like she's a teenager and coming up and is overwhelmed by the whole situation."

Li, who earlier joked she was motivated to win the tournament because of the prize money on offer, said Clijsters was the favourite and therefore there was no pressure on her.



KIM CLIJSTERS



LI NA

BSJA election held

SPORTS REPORTER

Noted sportys journalists Syed Mamun and Saidur Rahman were elected president and general secretary respectively at the 13th Biennial AGM and election of the Bangladesh Sports Journalists' Association (BSJA) conducted at its Platan office yesterday.

Dilu Khandaker, Arifur Rahman Babu and Mohammad Syeduzzaman were elected as vice-presidents as the 2011-2012 executive committee was elected unopposed.

Prime Bank badminton

SPORTS REPORTER

National badminton player Enayet Ullah emerged champion in the Prime Bank Pallima Sangsad Badminton Championship in Pallima Sangsad gorund in Khilgaon yesterday. Enayet beat national shuttler Saifuddin by 19-21, 21-19, 21-13 points.

In the girls' doubles final, Elina-Kanika pair defeated Dola-Dulali pair by 22-20, 21-12 points to become champions. The men's doubles final will be held today.

Doleshwar

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only 143 runs on the board. Aggressive approach from the Doleshwar batmen finished the game easily in the 27th over losing only three wickets with Arman Hossain scoring 45 and Sathish unbeaten on 48 runs off just 29 balls.

Orient Sporting Club is the other team who got relegated this year.

BRIEF SCORES

BKSP: 143 all out in 46.1 overs (Abid 51, Furkan 32, Delwar 3-25, Sathish 3-20). DOLESHWAR: 144-3 in 26.5 overs. (Arman 45, Sathish 48 not out; Mustaqim 1-18). Result: Doleshwar won by seven wickets.

It'll be a dream to play in WC: Misbah

PTI, Karachi



Veteran batsman Misbahul Haq, one of the prime candidates who is in the fray to lead the Pakistan side in the forthcoming World Cup has said that playing in the mega event would be a dream come true for him.

Misbah, 36, who has never played in World Cup and is currently the captain of the Test team said that taking part in a World Cup tournament feels playing in the showpiece event is a dream for every cricketer.

"It's an absolute honour for any professional cricketer to play in a World Cup," Misbah told a website. "It's the unquestionable pinnacle for any cricketer and I can't wait for the tournament to start."

Misbah is seen as one of the main rival to lead the national team in the World Cup starting from February 19 although flamboyant allrounder Shahid Afridi remains the one-day captain and is leading them in the ongoing rubber in New Zealand.

The right-hand batsman said that he was fully prepared and ready to take part in the World Cup. "The rest is up to the team management. If they feel that I have a role in the side and they think that I can contribute, then I will certainly not let anyone down," Misbah said. "It's always been my heartfelt wish to play in a 50 over World Cup and I am certain that I can perform well during the

upcoming tournament," he added.

Pakistan are placed in Group A alongside Australia, Sri Lanka, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Canada and start their campaign against Kenya on 23rd February in Hambantota.

Ironically, Misbah lost his place in the national one-day side last year for the last three one-day internationals against South Africa in the UAE because of poor form the same question now being raised about Shahid Afridi.

But the senior batsman's Test form in recent series has been superb and he has scored half centuries in all of his last six innings and he backed that up with a 50 in a low scoring first one-day international at Wellington as well when Pakistan was bowled out for just 124 runs.

Meanwhile former Pakistan captain and ex-chief selector, Aamir Sohail believes that Misbah will be a strong candidate for the World Cup captaincy if Afridi fails to perform himself and lead the team to victory in the ongoing ODI series in New Zealand.

"Afridi has to shape up as a player and leader because Misbah is breathing down his neck and there is a realistic chance that if Afridi does not lead the team to victory in New Zealand, he could lose the captaincy," Sohail said. "If Afridi fails to handle the pressure like a true leader then Misbah will become a strong candidate for the World Cup captaincy," Sohail said.

Gazi Tank

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GAZI: 169-6 in 38.5 overs (Nazir 62 not out, Alok 31, Sabbir 39; Azhar 4-38).

Result: Gazi Tank won by four wickets

CCS: 265 for four in 50 overs (Saikat 72, Taposh 52, Shuvagoto 31, Atik 54 not out, Nazmul 29 not out, extras 10)

ABAHANI: 269-6 in 49.3 overs (Hannan 34, Marshal 94, Rajat 97, extras 15; Nazmul 3-20).

Result: Abahani won by four wickets.

BIMAN: 237-9 in 50 overs (Sunny 60, Jahurul 102, Mosharraf 22, extras 8; Rashed 3-45, Tanvir 2-41).

DOHS: 222 all out in 48 overs (Farhad 80, Nurul 40, extras 4; Mosharraf 4-35, Talha 3-49). Result: Biman won by 15 runs.

SA win

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and it is underrated as compared to the win against India.

They were the No 1 team at the time, but the way we played, it was just amazing. Ashrafal bhai was brilliant. But it was a team effort and I think hardly ever does a plan work so well.

Dav (Whatmore) was telling us before the game that there is some pressure on Jacques Kallis regarding his strike-rate and true to the word, he tried to hit out and got out. It is important to execute the plan but I saw how it was done.

DSS: What is your expectation from the 2011 tournament?

TI: If we can play according to our ability, we can do well. I think our prime target will be to reach the second phase and take it from there.

Mushfiq

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last one year, I would say that I am having the best time with my wicketkeeping. I am happy to continue on what I have been doing," said Mushfiqur.

Unlike the wicketkeeper though, Nazmul Hossain was pleased to be part of the 15-member squad as he had missed out on the previous occasion. "Definitely I'm happy. I missed out on the 2007 World Cup, I was a standby player then. I am as excited as I was during my debut game," said the Sylhet-born paceman.

"I am enjoying my role here but yes, I do feel I was slightly unlucky with missing matches. Last year I played a good game against New Zealand but missed the next three due to a hand injury," he added.

AMEX GOLF Bhullar storms back to lead

SPORTS REPORTER

Gaganjeet Bhullar of India raced back to a three-stroke lead with an immaculate eight under par in round three of the American Express Bangladesh Open 2011 at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday. Bhullar's total moved to 13 under par (203) after the third round, three ahead of Kolkata's Raju Ali Mollah who fired a four under par in this round.

Shamim Khan, also from India, is placed third at nine under par (207) while Bangladesh's amateur Mohammad Zakiruzzaman is a further stroke behind in fourth position.

Defending champion Siddikur Rahman (71-68-71), who picked up five birdies and four bogeys in his round of 71, is currently in sixth place at six under par (210).

Zamal Hossain Mollah, the 2009 champion, is tied for the 31st place with an overall score of seven over par (223).

Bhullar, who is the frontrunner for the title now, had a bogey-free round that featured an eagle and six birdies. The six-time winner on the Aircel PGTI got off to a brilliant start with a birdie on the first. Bhullar then produced a 350-yard drive on the third before sinking a 20-footer for eagle. He closed the day on a high with his sixth birdie of the day on the 18th.

MSC hit

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the margin twice but goalkeeper Biplob Bhattacharjee successfully foiled both attempts in the dying moment while Bukola failed to beat MSC goalkeeper in a one-on-one situation in stoppage time of the second half.

"The boys were under pressure for victory though they did not play their natural game but they achieved their target by winning the game," said Muktijoddha coach Maruful Haque.

Kolkata pleads for second chance

AFP, New Delhi



The bosses of Kolkata's Eden Gardens insisted Friday they could be ready to host next month's India-England World Cup clash after the venue was ruled out because of unfinished renovation work.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) sparked a logistical nightmare for organisers on Thursday by asking for an alternative stadium for the February 27 match because of concerns about unfinished facilities at the famous ground.

The Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB), which runs the stadium, asked the ICC to reconsider its controversial ruling, which raised further questions about India's ability to host major sporting events.

CAB chief Jagmohan Dalmiya, a former ICC president and himself a construction company owner, wrote to the Indian cricket board on Friday to convince the governing body to stick to the original schedule.

"(The ICC's decision) comes as a shock because when their inspection team was in Kolkata, we were given to understand that they were happy with the progress of the work and had suggested only a few minor modifications," said the letter, seen by AFP.

CAB chiefs promised they would hand over a completed Eden Gardens to the ICC on February 7, "provided we are given an extension."

"Finally, we also state that we will address the bulk of the ICC concerns by January 31,

2011 itself and the remaining little, if any, in another seven days," the letter said.

World Cup organisers were struggling to find a different venue and organise travel, ticketing and security.

"It's a challenge for sure, but we are working on solving the issue at the earliest," tournament director Ratnakar Shetty told reporters at the World Cup headquarters in Mumbai.

The ICC was concerned about work in the renovated stands of Eden Gardens, as well as corporate boxes, the media centre and the location of the radio commentary boxes.

The problems echoed similar trouble before the Delhi Commonwealth Games in October that were marred by severe delays in construction work and shoddy finishing.

Tour operators said they hoped the matter would be resolved soon with the tournament looming.

"England v India is the biggest of all the group games," Shirley Rattray of Cricket Logistics, the ICC's official travel partner, told the Cricinfo website.

"It is the most popular because Eden Gardens is such an iconic venue to watch cricket. A match there is regarded as one of the sporting things to do before you die."

"So it's a big shame that the game has had to be moved."

Rattray said tickets needed to be relocated and fresh flights and hotels booked.

"It's never easy when things like this happen, but it will get done. That's the way things work in India, things can be turned around at the last minute very quickly."



PHOTO: COURTESY

Gaganjeet Bhullar of India tees off during the third round of the American Express Bangladesh Open 2011 at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday. Bhullar took a three-stroke lead with an eight under par in this round.