

Star SPORT

R'ganj, F'ganj make draw

SPORTS REPORTER

Promising striker Sohel Rana came off the bench to strike a brace as Farashganj SC cut back two-goal deficit to draw 2-2 against Rahmatganj MFS in the Grameenphone Bangladesh League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

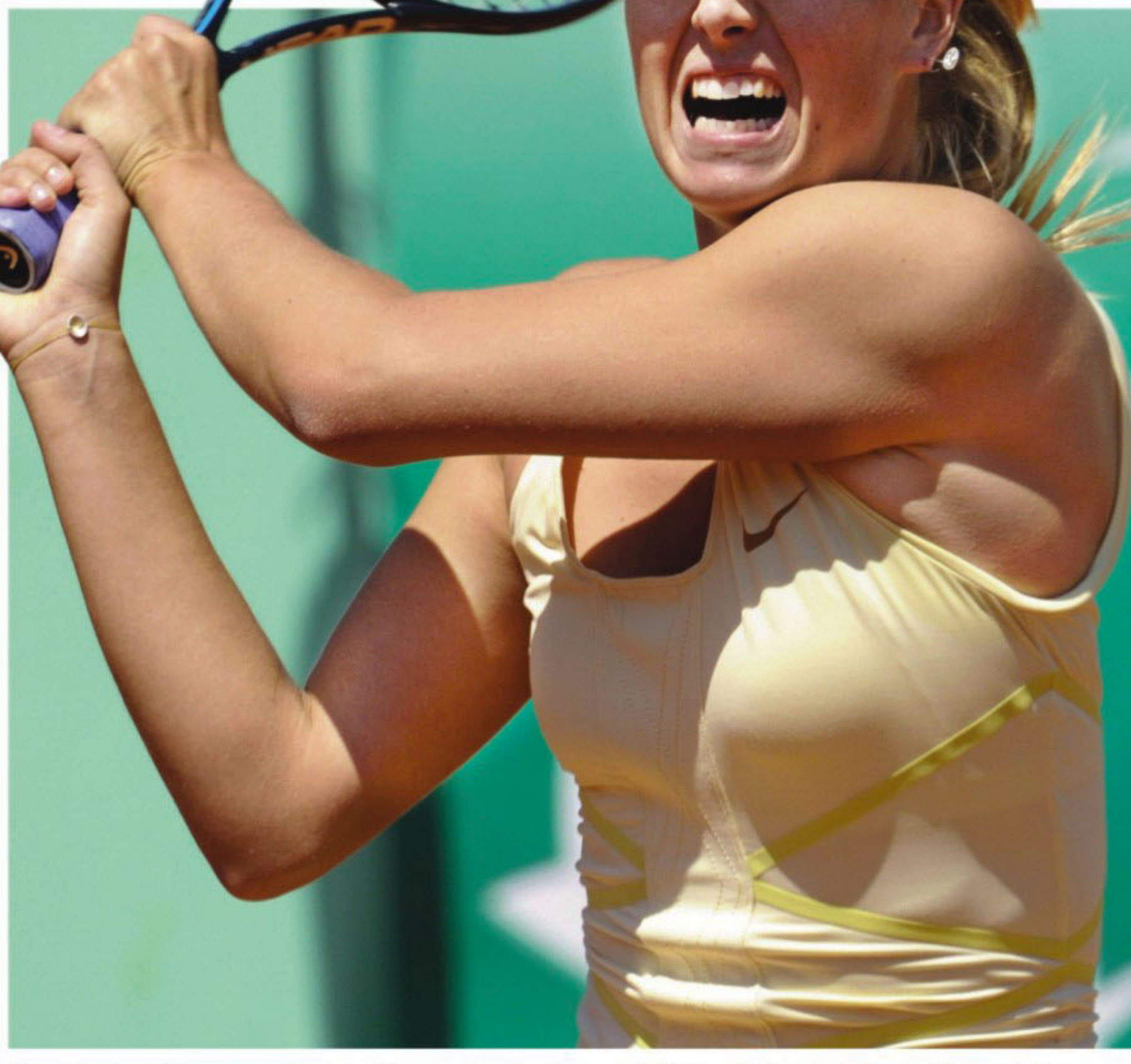
Ugandan striker Idris Kasirye gave Rahmatganj a 27th-minute lead before Jamal Hossain doubled the margin seven minutes into the second half.

But, Farashganj hit back in the 77th minute through Sohel before he levelled the margin in the 84th minute, converting a penalty kick.

Rahmatganj, on the back of 3-1 drubbing of Chittagong Abahani and 1-0 win over Dhaka Abahani, seemed to lack the bite in the initial moments against the Independence Cup winners Farashganj, before they took the lead on the half-hour mark.

"After a five-day break, we have practised for only two days before coming to this match as there were a lot of problems at the club. I cannot

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Russia's Maria Sharapova hits a backhand return to Germany's Andrea Petkovic during their French Open quarterfinal at Roland Garros yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Maria, Li in last four

AP, Paris



Maria Sharapova returned to the semifinals of a Grand Slam tournament for the first time in more than three years, defeating Andrea Petkovic 6-0, 6-3 Wednesday at the French Open.

The three-time major champion, who can complete a career Grand Slam with a title at Roland Garros, last reached this stage when she won the 2008 Australian Open.

Sharapova had little trouble against Petkovic, a German who lost in the Australian Open quarterfinals. Sharapova won the opening eight games and overcame two breaks to take the second set.

Sharapova will face Li Na of China. The Australian Open finalist defeated fourth-seeded Victoria Azarenka 7-5, 6-2.

Sharapova improved her Grand Slam quarterfinal record to 11-3 by beating Petkovic. All three of her losses came at Roland Garros.

The other time she reached the semifinals in Paris, she lost to runner-up Ana Ivanovic in 2007.

Besides the Australian Open title, the seventh-seeded Russian also won Wimbledon in 2004 and the US Open in 2006. With a title at Roland Garros, Sharapova will become the 10th woman to complete a career Grand Slam.

Defending champion Francesca Schiavone and No. 11 Marion Bartoli also

reached the semifinals Tuesday.

The 11th-seeded Frenchwoman Bartoli is known for her eccentricities while playing tennis, but they all seem to be paying off at this year's French Open right into the semifinals, where Bartoli finds herself after beating Svetlana Kuznetsova 7-6 (4), 6-4 Tuesday.

She is only the fourth Frenchwoman to reach the semifinals at Roland Garros in the Open era, which began in 1968.

Bartoli, who next faces defending champion Francesca Schiavone, is known as a maverick in France. With her father as coach, she has clashed with the French Tennis Federation and Fed Cup captain Nicolas Escude.

But she has also already reached one Grand Slam final, at Wimbledon in 2007, when she lost to Venus Williams. Now Bartoli finds herself in a major semifinal for the second time.

"Even if I played the final of Wimbledon, I never felt that excited," Bartoli said, describing her emotions as victory neared against Kuznetsova. "When she missed that forehand, then I was just like, 'My God, I'm in the semifinal of my home Grand Slam.'"

Bartoli said she has often crumbled under the pressure of playing at Roland Garros, advancing past the second round only twice in 10 previous attempts. To reach the final, she will have to beat Schiavone, who rallied to defeat Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 1-6, 7-5, 7-5.

Nadal-Murray semifinal

AGENCIES, Paris

World number one Rafa Nadal cranked up his bid for a record-equalling sixth French Open title by routing his nemesis Robin Soderling 6-4, 6-1, 7-6 (7/3) on Wednesday to power into the semifinals.

Nadal will now take on fourth seed Andy Murray of Britain who reached the last four with a 7-6 (7/2), 7-5, 6-2 win over Juan Ignacio Chela of Argentina.

The world number one has bemoaned his lacklustre form on clay over the last two weeks but was back to his dominant self in all areas.

Fifth seed Soderling, who inflicted Nadal's only men's singles defeat at the French Open in 2009 before losing to the Spaniard in last year's final, barely got a look-in despite breaking twice.

Nadal was playing shots he would not have attempted just a few days ago when his confidence was brittle while Soderling, staying glued to the baseline too often, also played into the champion's hands.

Signori lands in jail

Former Italy striker Giuseppe Signori was among 16 people arrested for match-fixing in a co-ordinated sting by Italian police on Wednesday, Italian news agency Ansa reported. Amongst those targeted were ex Serie A players and current players from both Serie B and Serie C as well as club directors from the lower leagues. The investigation was led by the mobile squad from Cremona but also included help from police forces from a dozen other towns, including Rome,



Barnes from the blue

Law too in contention



SPORTS REPORTER

It has emerged yesterday that the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has been positively considering Vincent Barnes as the new head coach for the Tigers.

BCB president AHM Mustafa Kamal disclosed the name of Barnes, the assistant coach of the South Africa, while talking to reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

"We want a coach who will work exclusively for the Bangladesh team. Vincent Barnes is in our consideration and the discussion is going on and hopefully we will take a decision in the board meeting on Saturday," said Kamal, who evidently asked if the reporters "heard of the coach" during the briefing.

Kamal later informed that they had talked with Sri Lanka's interim coach Stuart Law too and that the former Australian batsman is still in deliberation with the BCB.

"We are still in negotiations with Stuart Law. We are interested about him but we have given him some conditions. If he accepts those, we'll go for him," Kamal told The Daily Star. "It obviously means our talks

with him are not over," he added.

The choice has come as a major surprise as Barnes had never before come into any discussion or among the probable names. BCB has repeatedly mentioned since Jamie Siddons's departure in April that they want a coach who specialises in batting as Barnes was a paceman during his playing days.

Kamal however was not too concerned about this as he said that the board will bring a batting coach as well.

"If it doesn't go through with Law, we will take a final decision on Barnes because we don't have much time in our hands."

"If we take him, it is nothing to be worried about because we'll take a specialist coach for batting and bowling," said Kamal.

The 51-year-old Barnes has been working as an assistant coach of South Africa for seven years under Eric Simons, Ray Jennings, Mickey Arthur and lastly Corrie van Zyl.

A pace bowler, Barnes has played first-class cricket for 17 years since 1978 to 1995 and took 323 wickets (averaging an extraordinary 11.95) and has been coaching for 17 years and been in the national setup since 2003.

He was apparently upset after he was left

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VINCENT BARNES

Sunny, Dhiman rewarded

Tigers set squad for Zim camp



SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has called up a 32-member squad yesterday to take part in the conditioning camp from June 4.

Apart from the 18 BCB-contracted cricketers, the new selection panel led by Akram Khan, the former national captain, have also included domestic performers as well as those who have done well for the GP-BCB National Cricket Academy.

According to Akram, the number of players has been increased by two due to the absence of skipper Shakib Al Hasan, who is likely to be flying off to England to play for Worcestershire on Friday, and the injured Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.

"Shakib and Mashrafe are not available while [Shafiul Islam] Suhash will also be missing for ten to twelve days," he informed yesterday.

"Apart from the 18 contracted cricketers, we took the rest of the players

based on domestic performance as well as their work for Academy and the A team," added Akram.

It was a slightly sweeter welcome for Dhiman Ghosh, who has returned to the national fold for the first time in three years after joining the rebel Indian Cricket League, while for Elias Sunny, the call-up couldn't have come

for this opportunity. I always knew that even if I did well, there are national players who have held on to the spot with their performance, so I had to be patient."

Elias believed that the specific turning point was his man-of-the-tournament award in the just-concluded National Cricket League. "I

thought that was quite big, plus I did well in the A team," he added.

The chief selector was also happy with Sunny and Dhiman, who made 593 runs from nine first-class games this season. "Dhiman has been doing well in the last year or so while [Elias] Sunny has been doing well for 2-3 years," he said.

While the likes of Noor Hossain, Saqlain Sajib, Shubhashish Roy, Nadif Chowdhury and Syed Rasel made it

into the 32-man camp, someone like Forhad Reza, a performer in the A team's tour to South Africa as well as in the NCL, would consider himself unlucky. "It was quite difficult to name

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ELIAS SUNNY



DHIMAN GHOSH

earlier though it is his second such call-up in 30-man squad (the last one was ahead of the Twenty20 World Cup last year).

"Definitely I'm very happy," said Elias. "I think I did well in the last couple of seasons and I really had to wait

DIV-I BADMINTON

Knit, Biman fly high

SPORTS REPORTER

Title aspirants Knit Concern recorded their second successive victory in the Auto Museum First Division Badminton League defeating their opponents at the Wooden Floor Gymnasium yesterday.

Knit Concern, who on the first day beat Surjo Tarun 4-1, defeated Pacific Associates in straight 5-0 sets while defending champions Biman Bangladesh Airlines thrashed Surjo Tarun 5-0 following their 4-1 win over Pacific Associates on the opening day.

Gulshan Sporting Club beat Dewan Textile Badminton Club 3-2 while Maha Sporting Club defeated Aohban Badminton Club 4-1 in the day's other fixtures.



Farashganj SC striker Sohel Rana (L) tries to manoeuvre the ball past a lunging Rahmatganj MFS player during their Bangladesh League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Virtual title decider

Abahani take on Muktis today

SPORTS REPORTER



Holders Abahani and challengers Muktijoddha Sangsad lock horns today at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in what could be title-deciding match of the fourth edition of Bangladesh League.

Three-time champions Abahani are currently in fourth position with 35 points from 16 matches, six off leaders Sheikh Jamal having played two matches less while the early pace-setters Muktijoddha have 39 points from 17 matches.

Both sides consider that a loss in today's encounter will set them off the pace as star-studded Sheikh Jamal and new-powerhouse Sheikh Russel KC, with 38 points from 18 matches, well the hunt for the prestigious title.

Interestingly enough, the title race seemed to be a two-horse race between Muktijoddha and Abahani in the first phase of the league, but thanks to a few slip-ups from them and a winning streak from Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russel that has turned the league into a four-horse race and certainly more entertaining

than the previous editions. In fact, Sheikh Jamal's victory over Abahani in the first match of the second leg and Sheikh Russel's similar feat over Muktijoddha were the turning points of the league.

However, according to many, the four-way race was made possible due to the fact that this time the league has not been marred by match-fixing, which was allegedly a common phenomenon in the two-way battles in the previous editions.

Added to that was the formation of strong teams by Muktijoddha and Sheikh Jamal that challenged the establishment powerhouse Abahani and Mohammedan to make the league more interesting and a closer competition.

However, considering the current standings and the remaining matches, Muktijoddha are in a relatively better position since four of their five remaining matches are against mid-table sides. But their coach Maruful Haque believes this is the make or break match for the title race.

"We would have gone far ahead of the others had we not dropped some valuable

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