

Star SPORT

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Jankulovski calls time

Czech full-back Marek Jankulovski has called time on his playing career at the age of 34. Jankulovski has spent the last six years at AC Milan but struggled to get in the team in the last couple of seasons. "Italy has been my second home, as has Milan, but everything comes to an end," he told Milan's in-house TV channel. "The memory will stay with me and I can always come back. "When you leave somewhere you remember everything you've done and now I realise all the great things I managed to do here."



Honours even in 'final'

SPORTS REPORTER

Holder Abahani Limited and Muktiyoddha Sangsad shared the spoils in the virtual 'final' of the Grameenphone Bangladesh League when they played out a 1-1 draw at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Striker Mohammad Robin put the Sky Blues ahead in the 38th minute only to see his strike cancelled out by the Russian midfielder Boris Kochikin four minutes into the second half in front of a few hundred spectators at the Big Bowl. The outcome of the game means that Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club are still a point higher than Muktiyoddha, who have 40 points after playing the equal number of 18 games. Three-time champions Abahani stuck to the fourth-position with 36 points from 17 matches, two points behind third-placed Sheikh Russel KC. A defeat for any side could have thrown them out of the race but Muktiyoddha and Abahani still have a chance to win the prestigious title though both coaches believe it is only possible if the league leaders drop points. Considering the matches the title contenders have left to play, Muktiyoddha have the easiest run-in on paper as they will have to take on mid-table side Rahmatganj MFS

and three bottom teams -- Chittagong Mohammedan, Farashganj SC and Chittagong Abahani. On the other hand, Sheikh Jamal and Abahani will have to overcome hurdles against Sheikh Russel KC, Mohammedan SC and Brothers Union apart from mid-table sides. Abahani, on the back of a frustrating campaign in the AFC President's Cup and a defeat against Rahmatganj in their previous league match, looked determined to come back into the race. The boys of the Dhanmondi-based outfit put up a solid performance controlling the midfield from the start and took a deserved lead after a couple of brilliant saves from goalkeeper Ziaur Rahman, who stood under the Abahani post after 13 games following an injury worry with his forearm. Abahani's Iranian coach Ali Akbar had gambled with irregular hitman Robin instead of Shakawat Hossain Ronny and the striker, who worked hard throughout before being replaced by Ronny in 73rd minute, had started to pay off the coach's faith after coming close to an opener in the 16th minute before giving Abahani the lead in the 38th minute. Robin was presented with a through ball from the Ghanaian Yusuf Aminu, who was on in place of the suspended captain Pranotosh. Making space for himself, Robin

SEE PAGE 17 COL 2



Abahani Limited striker Mohammad Robin (2nd from L) attempts to stave off three Muktiyoddha Sangsad defenders during their Bangladesh League clash at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Robin gave Abahani the lead in the drawn game. PHOTO: STAR

Li-Schiavone showdown

Sharapova crashes out in semifinal

AP, Paris

Li Na is back in a Grand Slam final, reaching her second straight major championship match by beating Maria Sharapova 6-4, 7-5 Thursday in the French Open semifinals. The Australian Open runner-up, who became the first Chinese player to reach a Grand Slam final this year in Melbourne, was able to chase down nearly everything Sharapova had to offer on Court Philippe Chatrier. In Saturday's final, Li will face defending champion Francesca Schiavone. The fifth-seeded Schiavone, who last year became the first Italian woman to win a Grand Slam singles title, defeated No. 11 Marion Bartoli of France 6-3, 6-3. The wind was a factor yet again at Roland Garros, and Sharapova's serve suffered because of it. The seventh-seeded Russian had 10 double-faults in the match, including on match point. "She has a huge and big serve, so I was like: 'Please, double-fault. That way I can win the match,'" Li said. "I never believe myself I can be in final in French Open. I wish I can do even better on Saturday." Li finished with 24 winners, twice as many as Sharapova, and saved eight of 11 break points. Sharapova, who had been trying to become only the 10th woman to complete a career Grand Slam, was broken early in the first set, and then in her final two service games. In the eighth game, shortly after breaking Li to get back on serve at 4-3, Sharapova had three double-faults. "I had some chances in the first set on her serve, a couple of games that went deuce and had a couple of break points," Sharapova said. "I felt like I had a short ball and just didn't step in and then just made an unforced error. "Then you kind of give your opponent confidence ... and then at times I didn't serve well, and was rushing more than maybe I had to, and maybe went for considering the conditions maybe I was just trying to go for too big of second serves, especially."

for both of us." After reaching the semifinals on Wednesday, Li said she was surprised to go that far at the only clay-court Grand Slam. She has never won a title on clay, but she reached the semifinals at French Open warm-up tournaments in Madrid and Rome. Against Schiavone in the final, she will face a woman who is more suited to the surface and who became the first

player over 30 to reach a major final since Mary Pierce at the 2005 U.S. Open. Schiavone won the last four games of her match and finished off Bartoli by breaking her at love. She then rubbed her hand into the red clay on center court before kissing it. Last year, Schiavone dropped to the ground to kiss the clay after winning her first major title.



PHOTO: AFP

China's Li Na lets out a victory cry after defeating Russia's Maria Sharapova during their French Open semifinal at Roland Garros yesterday.

Sania-Elena in doubles final

PTI, Paris

Sania Mirza stormed into her maiden Grand Slam women's doubles final as she and her Russian partner Elena Vesnina defeated American duo of Liezel Huber and Lisa Raymond in a thrilling three-setter in the semifinals of the French Open on Thursday. Seeded seventh in the tournament, Sania and Elena upset their fourth seeded opponents 6-3, 2-6, 6-4 in 105 minutes at the Roland Garros. In Friday's summit clash, the Indo-Russian combo will face the unseeded Czech duo of Andrea Hlavackova and Lucie Hradecka, who stunned third seeded pair of Vania King of United States and Yaroslava Shvedova of Kazakhstan 6-3, 6-3 in another last four match. This is Sania's third Grand Slam final appearance in her career -- the first two being in the mixed doubles in the Australian Open.

Knit Concern, Biman dominate

SPORTS REPORTER

Title contenders Knit Concern and Biman continued their winning run in the Auto Museum First Division Badminton League as the men's team of both sides recorded their third successive victory at the Wooden Floor Stadium yesterday. Holders Biman registered a hard-fought 3-2 win over Gulhsan SC but Knit Concern recorded a comparatively easy 4-1 win over Maha Sporting Club. In the day's other encounters, Dewan Textile thrashed Pacific Associates 5-0 while Surjo Tarun defeated Ahoban Badminton Club 4-1. The women's team of Knit Concern followed the footstep of their male counterparts, blanking Pacific Associate in straight 3-0 sets while Dewan Textile defeated Surjo Tarun 3-1.

Fantastic four in semis

AFP, Paris



Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer and Andy Murray, the world's most accomplished players, serve up a French Open semifinals special on Friday with a series of records at stake. Djokovic, on a staggering 43-match unbeaten run stretching back to the Davis Cup final in December, will depose Nadal as world number one with victory over 2009 Roland Garros champion and 16-time Grand Slam title winner Roger Federer. Victory will also see him equal John McEnroe's 1984 mark of a 42-match winning start to a year. But he faces a rejuvenated Federer, seeded outside the top two for the first time since Wimbledon in 2003, who has reached his sixth Roland Garros semi-final without dropping a set. "A match between the greatest player ever and the greatest player of the moment," was how Nadal described the Federer-Djokovic clash. Defending champion Nadal, who will turn 25 on Friday, is just two wins from equalling Bjorn Borg's record of six French Open titles. He takes on fourth seeded Murray who can become the first British man since Bunny Austin in 1937 to reach the title match if he defeats Nadal for the first time on clay. Second seed Djokovic trails Federer 13-9 in

career meetings, but has won all of their three matches in 2011, including a straight-sets triumph over the great Swiss in the semi-finals of the Australian Open on his way to the title. The Serb hasn't played since Sunday after scheduled quarter-final opponent Fabio Fognini pulled out of their scheduled clash with a leg injury. But he insists that his unexpected break will not harm his chances against Federer. "I'm happy with my game. I'm playing the best tennis of my life at the moment," said Djokovic. Federer, without a Grand Slam title since the 2010 Australian Open, has cruised effortlessly through the tournament, enjoying the spotlight being trained brightly on Nadal and Djokovic. "There's less at stake for me than for Novak," said Federer, the last man to beat the Serb at the World Tour finals in London in November last year. "He's got a lot of things going on. I'd love to be in a Grand Slam final, because I haven't achieved it for a few Slams, but it's nothing major for me, as long as I keep playing well." Nadal dropped 53 games on his way to the quarter-finals, the most he has conceded in his Roland Garros career. But in taking his tournament record to 43 wins against one just defeat in beating Robin Soderling -- the man who caused that blemish in 2009 -- the Spaniard put on his best

SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

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