

Messi punched by rival fan

A rival fan threw a punch at Lionel Messi on Thursday as the Barcelona star was signing autographs and meeting with fans in his home town in Argentina, according to witnesses. The star forward played down the incident, which took place in the town of Rosario some 300 kilometres (180 miles) north of Buenos Aires, telling local media he didn't feel a thing and only found out about the punch later. Witnesses said the assailant was among a group of young people who had gathered to get autographs and that he pulled a hood over his head and ran away after the attack.



PHOTO: AFP
Defending champion Rafael Nadal of Spain pumps his on winning a point against Britain's Andy Murray during their semifinal clash of the French Open at Roland Garros on Friday. Nadal won the match 6-4, 7-5, 6-4.

Nadal's birthday bash Edges Murray to reach final

AFP, Paris
Rafael Nadal moved to within one win of equalling Bjorn Borg's record of six French Open titles with a hard-fought yet convincing 6-4, 7-5, 6-4 semifinal win over a battling Andy Murray on Friday. It was a perfect way to celebrate his 25th birthday for the Spaniard, but he was made to scrap hard by the Scot who shrugged off the effects of an ankle injury to produce his best ever performance on clay. The win sets up the five-times defending champion and top seed for a mouthwatering final on Sunday against the winner of the other semifinal opposing second seed Novak Djokovic and third seed Roger Federer. For Murray, seeded four, his feisty performance was a fitting way to end a brave campaign that saw him battle through illness, a twisted ankle and a broken tooth as he continued his quest for a first Grand Slam title. His only regret could be only converting three of the 18 break points he had on the Nadal serve. "Andy is a fantastic player. He deserves to win a Grand Slam very soon," said Nadal. "I saved a lot of break points at important moments. The conditions were not easy with the wind changing a lot. "I will be playing next against the best player of all time (Federer) or against the best player at the moment (Djokovic), so we shall see." The first four games were closely fought

Mystery shrouds Rubcic's trip

SPORTS REPORTER
Despite admitting the fact that Croatian coach Robert Rubcic had left Bangladesh without prior notice, the Bangladesh Football Federation yesterday said Rubcic would return soon after resolving an emergency family problem. The 46-year old coach left Bangladesh early on Thursday without informing any BFF officials or requesting leave. "It is right that Rubcic did not inform us about his departure but we came to know today (Friday) after talking to the chairman of the Team Management Committee, Badal Roy, who was to leave Zurich after attending the FIFA Congress. He informed us that Rubcic had let him know

Return to the fields Tigers' fitness camp from today

Cricket
SPORTS REPORTER
A month-long fitness camp for 32 elite cricketers will begin today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Headed by trainer Grant Luden, the national players as well as Bangladesh A, GP-BCB Academy and domestic performers will go through a comprehensive workout that will cover all the areas and have new training tests and methods. Also, probably for the first time, it will be screened minutely by Luden who will be armed with monitors showing the players' intensity during the endurance sessions (so that nobody can slack off). Skipper Shakib Al Hasan, who left the capital to play for Worcestershire, and the injured Mashrafe Bin Mortaza will be the only players not attending the camp while Shafiqul Islam, suffering heel calluses, will be out for a while. The first part of the camp will span 32 days after which the skills will be touched upon when the new coach arrives, presumably by the first week of next month. Fielding too, a discipline that will test agility and reactions will begin at the start of July, four weeks ahead of their departure to Zimbabwe. "It [the camp] will begin with a fitness

Much-hyped BCB meeting today

SPORTS REPORTER
The much-talked about Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) executive committee meeting will be held today at its office in the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Everybody is looking forward to this meeting as BCB president AHM Mustafa Kamal informed recently that they were going to take a final decision regarding appointment of the new head coach for the Tigers. But sources said that the board has yet to reach an advance stage of negotiation with any candidate, rather all the discussion still remains at a preliminary stage and that's why one board director quipped that it would be really a great surprise for everybody if the board can take a final decision regarding appointment of a new coach during today's meeting. And the fact is that chief

Parul, Siddique take spotlight

Swimming
SPORTS REPORTER
While six records were set on the opening day of the Ashiyon City 27th Age-level Swimming Championships, the prime focus was on two mentally-challenged swimmers at the National Swimming Complex in Mirpur yesterday. Parul Akhter and Siddique Hossain from Dhamrai along with other swimmers participated in their respective 100m breaststroke events of the 15-17 age group as part of their preparation for Special Olympic to be held in Athens from June 25 to July 4. Parul crossed the set-mark in the heats but Siddique narrowly missed the one set by the federation for all swimmers. "A total of four mentally-challenged swimmers have been training at the BKSP from early April and Parul and Siddique have been taken here to give them an environment of competition as they have never competed before," said coach Golam Mostafa adding that all four swimmers would take part in the Special Olympic. Bangladesh had bagged three gold and as many silver medals in the previous edition of the Special Olympics in Beijing, informed Mostafa, who is also



PHOTO: STAR
Babita Khatun paddles away during the Ashiyon City 27th Age-level Swimming Championships at the National Swimming Complex yesterday. a joint secretary of Bangladesh Swimming Federation (BSF). Both Parul and Siddique looked to have enjoyed the atmosphere of the national swimming complex where over 600 participants, split into five age groups, are competing in a hundred events. The record-breaking swimmers are Palash Chowdhury, Moriam Khatun, Jewel Ahmed, Babita Khatun and Nazma Khatun, who created two competition records. Having erased previous record of 2:07.34 minutes, Palash of BKSP clocked 2:06.50 minutes to set a record in 200m freestyle of the 18-20 age group. In the same group Jewel Ahmed of Ansar made record in 200m butterfly with a time of 2:17.22 seconds that eclipsed previous record of 2:20.68 minutes while Babita Khatun clocked 1:22.15 minutes to eclipse previous record of 1:22.16 minutes. Mariam Khatun of Ansar set record in 200m breaststroke of the 13-14 age group with a time of 3:05.63 that erased the previous time of 3:07.66 minutes. Nazma of Ansar produced two records in the 13-14 age group as she took 2:53.87 minutes to cross in 200m individual medley and clocked 2:30.63 minutes in 200m freestyle.



PHOTO: AFP
Defending champion Francesca Schiavone (L) of Italy and Li Na of China pose on the eve of their final of the French Open at Roland Garros yesterday.

Battle of the golden oldies

fans." A few months ago, Li became the first Chinese player to even reach a Grand Slam final before losing to Kim Clijsters. But in China, a country of 1.3 billion people, the sport is gaining more followers as the middle class grows. Li said she heard 40 million people watched her beat Maria Sharapova on Thursday in the semifinals. Schiavone, the first woman from her country to win a major, went through a similar experience 12 months ago. And an increase in youth tennis in Italy followed. "Last year when I won French Open, the percentages of the people that sign (up) in the tennis club, the young, the kids, are much higher than before. So that's good," Schiavone said. "Of course, we are not millions and millions like in China, because we are totally -- how many we are? Seventy million? "So it's big difference, but we are Italian. We have big hearts." Combined, the finalists are the oldest pair in a women's Grand Slam championship match since Wimbledon in 1998,

when Jana Novotna, 29, beat Nathalie Tauziat, 30. Li is 29, but any questions about her advanced age -- for a tennis player, that is -- come with some risk. "I'm not old," Li pouted when asked about the recent trend of older Grand Slam champions in the women's game. "Why do you think I'm old? I feel I'm still young." The 30-year-old Schiavone is about 1 1/2 years older than Li, but is taking her second Grand Slam final in stride. "I (will) go to take a walk I think this afternoon and then rest a little bit, get some physiotherapy," Schiavone said of her plans for her day off. "Eating, enjoy with friends. Nothing special. "I don't think now (about) Li Na. I will think tomorrow." When she does get around to it, Schiavone will be able to recall last year, when she became the first Italian woman to win a Grand Slam title and the oldest woman since 1969 to win her first major title. Along the way to that championship, she beat Li 6-4, 6-2 in the third round,

evening their head-to-head record to 2-2. That wasn't a surprise, because Schiavone is comfortable on the red clay, while Li has said she was never a fan of the surface. "It's a mix of everything. So you have to be good physically, mentally," Schiavone said of the clay. "You can't play just power, because you have always the time to (defend) and to counterattack." Schiavone is playing in her first final since last year's tournament at Roland Garros. And by winning her second major championship, she would become the first woman over 30 to win a Grand Slam title since Martina Navratilova won Wimbledon at the age of 33 in 1990. Before that happens, Schiavone will have to take care of Li on Court Philippe Chatrier. That may not be so easy. "In Melbourne was like first time in the final. You don't have any experience before you come to the Grand Slam final," Li said, remembering her recent experience at the Australian Open. "But I have one time already, so I think I can do better in this time."

Biman, Knit Concern share lead

SPORTS REPORTER
Holders Bangladesh Biman and title contenders Knit Concern Badminton Club maintained the lead in the Auto Museum First Division Badminton League after winning their respective games at the Wooden Floor Gymnasium yesterday. Biman thrashed Maha Sporting Club 4-1, Knit Concern beat Gulshan Club 3-2, Dewan Textile Badminton Club defeated Ahoban Badminton Club and Surjo Tarun Club beat Pacific Associates 3-2. In the women's section, Knit Concern defeated Dewan Textile straight 3-0 sets while Surjo Tarun crashed Pacific Associates also by 3-0 sets.