

Nadal's birthday bash

Messi punched

A rival fan threw a punch at Lionel Messi on

Thursday as the Barcelona star was signing

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

Witnesses said the assailant was among a

get autographs and that he pulled a hood

group of young people who had gathered to

over his head and ran away after the attack.

punch later.

autographs and meeting with fans in his

home town in Argentina, according to

by rival fan

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

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

the effects of an ankle injury to produce his

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

and took 28 minutes to complete but by the end of them Nadal had taken a 3-1 lead after Murray failed to convert the three break points he had.

More worrying still for the Scot was that he twice winced in pain when turning and twisting on his right ankle and was clearly not fully fit.

Nadal turned the screw to take a 5-1 lead but played an uncustomary sloppy game when serving for the set as Murray got back one of the service breaks.

He had to save two break points two games later, but dug deep to take the opening set 6-4 in 62 minutes, leaving the Herculean task facing Murray looking even tougher.

Still it was Murray who was mostly dominating the rallies going into the second set as he dragged Nadal about from side to side with his angled drives from the baseline.

But the Spaniard typically flung up his peerless defences and it was Murray who ceded serve first with an error-strewn fifth

A Nadal double fault gave Murray the break back to level at 3-3, and he rattled the Spaniard further in the following game before double-faulting himself on game point to allow Nadal to break again.

Murray made it four breaks in a row to level at 4-4, but despite some heroic resistance against a rampaging Nadal, he dropped serve again in the 11th game and Nadal served out for a two sets lead.

Parul, Siddique take spotlight

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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 SEE PAGE 17 COL 2

Return to the fields

gym sessions."

he added.

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 Shafiul 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 test, covering all the bases," said Luden

yesterday. "The focus will be on strength,

endurance and speed. They will take part in a

lot of running and build strength through

half years and admittedly, this is a first such

camp for him. "The reason for doing this

camp is that I have never undertaken a

proper pre-season fitness camp. It has

always been maintenance work. I think it

The Akram Khan-led selection commit-

tee has included a host of faces who are

making a comeback into the national setup

after a few years. Left-handed batsman

Nasiruddin Faruque is one of those, and the

National Cricket League's highest scorer is

excited to be in such a camp after two years.

Academy, I'm returning after two years so

I'm excited," said Faruque. "I want to con-

tinue how I started the year and since this is a

fitness camp, I would focus on that aspect."

Faruque was frank to admit that it is hard to

do all the fitness work on his own and one

can't blame him. Outside the national setups,

hardly any cricketer can avail such facilities.

"There is guidance and the camp is usually

"Since my stint with the A team and the

will prepare them in the best possible way,

The much-talked about Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) executive committee meeting will be held today at Luden has been on the job for two and a 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 SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

Swimming

SPORTS REPORTER

While six records were set on the opening day of the Ashiyan 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 swim-

"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



Babita Khatun paddles away during the Ashiyan 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

The record-breaking swimmers are Palash Chowdhuy, 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

surface.

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.



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.

AP, Paris

With a racket in her hand, Li Na holds the key to a burgeoning tennis boom in China. The 29-year-old Li, who is

trying to become the first Chinese player

to win a Grand Slam singles title, will face

defending champion Francesca Schiavone in the French Open final on Saturday.

"Tennis is something of an overlooked sport in China," the Australian Open runner-up said Friday. "So I hope that it will become more common in China and that more and more people will become

Battle of the golden oldies

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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 evening their head-to-head record to 2-2 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,

That wasn't a surprise, because Schiavone is comfortable on the red clay, while Li has said she was never a fan of the

"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

Wimbledon at the age of 33 in 1990. Before that happens, Schiavone will have to take care of Li on Court Philippe

title since Martina Navratilova won

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.