

Vaughan to trek the Great Wall

In May, Adam Parore conquered Mount Everest. Now, another cricketer is set to take on a different colossus. Michael Vaughan will trek some part of the Great Wall of China in September, with wife Nicola – who came up with the idea, according to the BBC website – and about 20 buddies for company. The trek, which is for charity, will take seven days. The group will follow the Huangyaguan Hills, go northwest of Beijing through the mountains, and up Heaven's Ladder – a steep climb of over 200 steps. Right then, any guesses who our next cricketer-turned-adventurer might be?



PHOTO: AFP

MAKING HISTORY: China's Li Na is all smiles after becoming the first Asian woman to win a Grand Slam singles title by defeating Italy's Francesca Schiavone in the French Open final at Roland Garros yesterday.

Li makes history

AFP, Paris

Li Na made sporting history at the French Open on Saturday when she became the first player from Asia to win a women's Grand Slam singles title. The 29-year-old from Wuhan defeated defending champion Francesca Schiavone of Italy 6-4, 7-6 (7/0) to take her place in the pantheon of Chinese sports stars.

Li clinched the watershed win with a superb 7-0 tie-break performance in the second set, falling onto her back in the red dirt when Schiavone hit long on matchpoint.

It was a thrilling display of shot-making from the Chinese player who has said she hopes that by winning a Grand Slam title she will act as a catalyst for the growth of tennis in her giant homeland.

For 30-year-old Schiavone it was a bitter pill to swallow one year after she upset the odds to become Italy's first and so far only Grand Slam women's champion.

"I was 4-2 up and she tried to come back, but I just had to stand up again and I made it. I think everyone in China will be so excited," said Li.

"I was nervous but I didn't want to show my opponent."

Schiavone said: "She played well. I couldn't push her from the baseline. Then we were closer. One has to lose, one has to win. She deserved to win."

In what was the oldest Grand Slam singles final in 21 years, the combined ages of the two players was 60 years and 79 days.

Schiavone was looking to her claycourt expertise and experience of winning here last year to make the difference, while Li said that having

played and lost a Grand Slam final already this year in Australia would help her confidence.

With the final broadcast live on television in China, where interest in her exploits has spiralled, Li had the first break point of the match on a sultry, still afternoon on the Philippe Chatrier centre court but she clattered a forehand long.

A tense, closely-fought start to the final pitted the wiry Schiavone's vicious top spin and tactical guile against the more powerful flat-hitting of the athletic Li and it was the Chinese seventh seed who drew first blood in the fifth game.

A poorly executed drop shot from Schiavone gave Li two break points and she took the second of these when an under-pressure Schiavone hit a forehand wide.

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New selectors, new tasks

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Akram Khan is quite aware that a selection committee made up of three former national captains would face a different set of challenges.

The burly batsman of the yesteryears cut a cake yesterday at the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) headquarters, in the presence of the 32 elite cricketers called up for the fitness camp and other board officials, to mark the start of his reign as the chief alongside fellow selectors Habibul Bashar and Minhazul Abedin Nannu. Such celebratory practices are rare with the cricket board, perhaps an attempt to catch up with the times.

Akram said that due to the make-up of this new committee, a lot will be expected of them.

"I am lucky to have two former captains alongside me," said Akram. "[Minhazul Abedin] Nannu bhai was into coaching while I have been a selector for the past three and a half years. [Habibul Bashar] Sumon too has recently stopped playing so I think this is a good mix."

There will always be a distance between selectors and players no matter how congenial the environment is, Akram stressing that he would still try and make players feel like

they are in a "family".

Akram, who led Bangladesh between 1995 and 1998 during which he steered the national team to the ICC Trophy, probably remembers his last days with the Tigers as they weren't all rosy and it was no different for the two other selectors, in Nannu's case the whole nation famously taking his side after he was not included in the 1999 World Cup squad.

But all three steered clear of any such parley and focused on how they can use their experience in a positive manner.

"The average age of this team is 22-23 but we'd like to see it become 27. I don't think we will make many changes, and you would have seen the same in the last few years."

"We realise that there are very few back-up players so our focus will be to try and find many more from the age-group and develop them," said Akram.

Nannu, who was head coach of the Under-19 team till last year's World Cup, said that the new job will be challenging. "If I am honest, I can do well. We have understanding among each other as we have played together," he said.

Bashar added that his proximity with the players, given that he is the last among this group to have retired from international cricket, will be of advantage. "I think I will take

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Shakib plays for Royals today

SPORTS REPORTER

Shakib Al Hasan returns to the Worcestershire fold today in a Friends Life t20 game against Durham Dynamos at New Road.



The match will begin at 7:30pm Bangladesh time.

The Royals lost their first Twenty20 game of the season to Lancashire Lightning by eight runs and would look to bounce back with a win.

Shakib had a remarkable first season with Worcestershire in 2010, claiming 35 wickets in eight first-class appearances with best bowling figures a match-winning 7-32 during the against Middlesex.

The national captain will be joined by Pakistan off-spinner Saeed Ajmal for the Twenty20s.



PHOTO: STAR

(From L to R) Elias Sunny, Nasiruddin Faruque, Saqlain Sajib and Noor Hossain await the start of their fitness camp at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Sunday's Saturday slam

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club's Nigerian striker Sunday Chizoba slammed a hat-trick as ten-man Mohammedan came from behind to beat visiting Feni Soccer Club 3-2 in a see-saw battle of the Grameenphone Bangladesh League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The 25-year old Nigerian gave Mohammedan a surprise lead in the 33rd minute against the run of play, when he powered the opposition keeper Jahangir Alom Niloy off the ball and stabbed it home. The referee pointed to the center, paying little heed to the stifled protest from the Feni players.

The Feni keeper, who was substituted later, looked out of sorts as he fumbled a couple more in the next few minutes, but Mohammedan were not good enough to take advantage.

When it seemed Mohammedan had a stranglehold of the game, it changed colour courtesy of a handled ball inside their penalty box by Mohammedan defender Akramuzzaman Liton in the 43rd minute, resulting in a spot kick for the visitors. Nigerian Nuche Francis stepped up and converted the kick



PHOTO: STAR

Mohammedan Sporting Club's Sunday Chizoba scores one of his three goals during his side's 3-2 win over Feni Soccer Club in the Grameenphone Bangladesh League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

to level the margin.

Mohammedan came close to scoring twice more after the break, the first one being wasted by Sunday and his second effort saved by Feni's substitute keeper Abdul Kader.

The action shifted at the other end, when Feni were gifted another penalty on the 66th minute as Liton tugged Feni striker Nuche Francis from behind inside the box. Lito was given his marching orders while Feni got to a 2-1 lead through Dominic Kabuye's conversion.

Interestedly enough, being reduced to ten men, Mohammedan seemed to find the fight they were

lacking, as they laid incessant attacks at the Feni backline. And they deservedly found the equaliser in the 76th minute as Sunday headed in a Sohel Rana cross from the left. Five minutes later, Sunday scored the winner as he completed his hat-trick with a simple stab on a Shariful Islam cross.

The hat-trick took the Nigerian's tally to eleven goals in the league, fifth on the scoring chart, and a staggering feat considering that he has only played eight matches so far. And courtesy of Sunday's hat-trick, Mohammedan leapfrog to fifth position with 27 points while Feni remain on tenth position with

14 points, both from 19 matches.

The six feet tall Nigerian, thanking God for his feat, said he was setting his sights for the top-scorer's prize.

"I want to be the top scorer in the current league. And hopefully I will play in a lower league somewhere in Europe next season."

In related news, Mohammedan Sporting Club on Thursday registered Nigerian Abochi Nnadi Victor as their new foreign recruit for the ongoing Bangladesh League season. The inclusion comes after Mohammedan applied for a replacement for Rwandan Habumugisha Ismael who died on May 24.

Record-breaking day at C'ships

Swimming

SPORTS REPORTER

Four new records were set at the National Swimming Complex yesterday as Bangladesh Ansar held on to the lead in the medals table of the Ashiyani City 27th National Age-Group Swimming Championships at the end of the second day.

With 70 events already decided and a further 30 events to be decided on the

BD finish runners-up

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh became runners-up in the team event of the 4th Asian Carom Championship that concluded in Male, Maldives yesterday. Bangladesh defeated Sri Lanka, Maldives, Malaysia, Singapore, Korea, and Pakistan but lost to eventual champions India. The 3-member Bangladesh team were comprised of Humayun Kabir, Moniruzzaman, and Mohammad Ali.

last day today, Ansar lead the medals tally with 37 gold, 24 silver and 15 bronze. Defending champions BKSP, who are in second place with 30 gold, have won more silver and bronze (38 silver and 25 bronze) than Ansar. In distant third are Comilla District Sports Association with two gold, one silver and five bronze.

Meanwhile, Babita Khatun of Ansar bagged her seventh gold with a record timing of 3 minutes 1.51 seconds, in the 200m backstroke event of the 18-20 year age-group, beating the previous mark by a 29th of a second.

Jewel Ahmed of the same team set a record in the 1500m freestyle event, clocking 18 minutes 10.10 seconds, beating the previous record by 21.03 seconds.

Titu Mia of BKSP set a 50m freestyle record in the 13-14 year age-group, finishing in 26.98 seconds, beating the previous mark by 0.47 seconds. In the same event of the girls' group, Nazma Khatun broke the record with a time of 30.92 seconds, edging out the previous mark by 0.31 seconds.

No headway on coach issue

SPORTS REPORTER

As expected no decision was made regarding the appointment of the new head coach in yesterday's much-talked about Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) executive committee meeting.

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Knit Concern & Biman to square off

SPORTS REPORTER

Knit Concern, who won the women's title yesterday, will face off with Biman Bangladesh Airlines in a virtual men's title-decider of the Auto Museum First Division Badminton Championship at the Wooden Floor Gymnasium today. Defending champions Biman and Knit both won all their six matches so far as Biman blanked Abohan Club 5-0 while Knit thrashed Dewan Textile 4-1 yesterday.

In the other matches, Gulshan Club edged Pacific Associates 3-2 while Maha Sporting defeated Surja Tarun by the same margin.